

Unruly passenger dies during flight

ISTANBUL, Turkey (AP) — An unruly passenger died aboard a Malev Hungarian airliner on Saturday after being strapped to his seat and injected with tranquillisers. The passenger, identified by Turkey's Anatolia news agency as Finnish national Mikaelin Peterson, was dead by the time the jet made an emergency landing in Istanbul. Anatolia and Hungary's MTI news agency said the man started harassing others aboard a flight from Bangkok to Budapest. He allegedly punched a pilot and tried to choke an attendant. The crew and passengers tied him to his seat and a doctor aboard gave him an injection. An autopsy done later in the day showed he died because of the mixture of the tranquilliser and some other drug or alcohol. Witnesses saw the man take a pill before he became violent and authorities suspected he was drunk, Anatolia said. The crew and the doctor were being interrogated at the airport. A new crew from Hungary was expected to fly the jet to Budapest with 189 other passengers later Saturday.

Jordan Times

An independent Arab political daily published by the Jordan Press Foundation
جوردان تايمز يومية سياسية مستقلة تصدر عن مؤسسة الصحافة الأردنية، الرأي

Draft budget sent to Parliament

AMMAN (J.T.) — The government on Saturday approved the 1999 proposed budget and sent it to Parliament, Finance Minister Michel Marto said Saturday. The minister added that the budget's total expenditure would be JD2160 million, including JD1863 million as current expenditure and JD477 million as capital expenditure. Marto said he hopes that the total expenditures would not exceed JD2113 million, reserving in a JD47 million surplus. According to the minister, a JD388 million deficit would be covered by JD200 million provided as grants and financial assistance, while the rest would be obtained through local and foreign loans.

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Palestinian protesters clash with Israeli troops

Agencies

ANGRY PALESTINIAN protesters trying to tear down a fence around a Jewish settlement on occupied Arab land were dispersed by Israeli soldiers firing plastic-coated metal bullets and tear gas Saturday, witnesses said.

Meanwhile, Palestinian leaders called a meeting of the Palestinian Central Council (PCC) in Gaza Thursday to reaffirm their acceptance of Israel's right to exist.

The PCC, speaking for the membership of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), is expected to endorse President Yasser Arafat's nullification of articles in the PLO Charter which called for the destruction of the Israeli state (see story on page 12).

About 100 protesters, demonstrating against Israel's continued detention of over 2,500 Palestinians in its jails, poured out their anger at the Ariel settlement in the West Bank by trying to pull down its metal fence.

Ten Palestinians were wounded from tear gas and two others were beaten by Israeli soldiers who damaged a Palestinian protest tent situated near the settlement, one witness said.

The Israeli army said it was checking the report. Israel Radio reported demonstrators set fire to an electricity pole near the settlement and threw stones at the homes of Jewish settlers.

Palestinian demonstrations have been prompted by Israel's release of 150 common criminals in the first group of 250 Palestinian prisoners freed in November in the first stage of the implementation of the interim Wye peace accord.

Israel made a verbal pledge at the Wye River talks to free 750 Palestinian captives in three stages.

Palestinian officials said Israel had promised to free political detainees, not criminals.

The United States Friday backed Israeli terms for free-

ing Palestinian prisoners. "In our view at this stage, the Israelis have done what they said they would do at Wye concerning prisoner releases," said State Department spokesman James Foley.

Israel has said the remaining 500 prisoners to be released under the Wye accord will also be criminals because there were no remaining Palestinian political prisoners without "blood on their hands" or membership of the Islamist movement, Hamas.

Palestinian demonstrators holding photographs of jailed relatives also marched through the streets of Ramallah in the West Bank in protest at Israel's refusal to release political prisoners.

A masked Palestinian burnt an Israeli flag with the Nazi swastika painted on it during the protest.

A mother holding a vigil in Nablus for her son imprisoned for ten years said the release of prisoners should be a precondition to any changes of the Palestinian National Charter which calls for the destruction of Israel. "It is time to open a new page in relations between the Israeli and the Palestinian people. I ask to close the war files in order to open the peace files," Asma' Asi said, holding up a photograph of her jailed son.

Palestinian prisoners have staged intermittent hunger strikes since November.

A spokeswoman for the Israel prison authority said 260 security prisoners in Naftha prison refused to take three meals Saturday. But in other jails, he said, they were eating.

But a spokesman for a Palestinian prisoners' association said in Ramallah all Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails started an open-ended hunger strike Saturday to demand their immediate release.

The prisoners' spokesmen told a press conference that "all 3,000 Palestinians" held in Israeli jails would join the hunger strike until Israel released 750 of them, as promised under the Wye Plan-tation accords.



A Palestinian youth passes by Israeli soldiers waving his national flag on Saturday near the Israeli settlement of Ariel, south of Nablus, after clashes occurred between Palestinian demonstrators and Israeli troops to protest against Israel's continued expansion of Jewish settlements in the occupied territories. Six Palestinians were wounded as a result (AFP photo)

Drive to put press law on House agenda initiated

By Amy Henderson

AMMAN — Lower House deputies yesterday said they are preparing to circulate a petition to collect signatures to put the controversial 1998 Press and Publications Law back on the Lower House's agenda during the current session.

Lower House opposition deputy Khalil Hadadin said the petition had not been circulated for signatures yet, but that a programme to do so was well underway.

"I do not want to disclose names of those who are supporting the initiative at this point," Hadadin said. "We know that there are more than ten deputies interested in putting the press law back on the agenda, but we want to generate all the support possible before disclosing their names."

The Constitution allows that any 10 or more deputies or senators propose any law, which is then referred to the concerned committee; in the case of the press law, the National Guidance Committee. If the House accepts the proposal, it then refers it to the government to draft as legislation.

Deputy Nazih Ammarin said that those in support of the petition will urge their colleagues in the Lower House to amend the present

law, passed this summer after an arduous, week-long series of closed hearings on the merits and faults of the government-drafted legislation.

"We are seeking only to make amendments because the composition of the parliament at this moment makes it impossible to bring an entirely new law," Ammarin said.

The deputy added that support for amendments to the law extended beyond the handful of opposition parliamentarians and that supporters of amending the law are trying to find a "common vision" in which conservative House members could also voice their support for amendments that will "give a better opportunity to advance press freedoms than that available now."

As Parliament debated the law — voted on by only 38 of its 80 deputies after 14 deputies stomped out of the House citing violations of parliamentary by-laws during the final reading of the law — Lower House members complained of substantial government influence, including the presence of government officials during National Guidance Committee meetings and closed door hearings with members of the press.

Newly-elected Speaker of the Lower House Abdul

Hadi Al Majali was quoted in Al Dustour Arabic daily yesterday as suggesting that some parliamentarians had been subjected to government pressure during the debate of the law last summer.

"No single group should dictate its opinion to the others," Majali said. "What is required is that all issues be discussed without pressures or influences and decisions be made after each issue is studied thoroughly. Parliament and its committees should not come under the influence of the executive and should be able to provide deputies with all resources possible to enrich debate and dialogue in order to take the right decisions through a parliamentary majority."

"These factors were not readily available to deputies who decided on the press law," Majali said. "But the law has become effective and can be amended. It must be said that the general atmosphere in which the law was passed was not comfortable to all parties. If the pressure on Parliament is relieved, Parliament will mature and produce individuals capable of working properly."

The deputies expect to present their petition to National Guidance Committee within the coming ten days (see related story on page 3).

Annan in Libya, hopes to 'break ice' over Lockerbie

By Paul Majendie
Reuters

LONDON — U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan feels that "maybe he can break the ice" with Libyan President Muammar Qadhafi over the surrender of two suspects in the 1988 Lockerbie bombing, his spokesman said on Saturday. But he insisted that Annan was very much "the man in the middle" between Libya on the one hand and Britain and the United States on the other.

Annan flew to Libya from Tunisia on Saturday, evidently discounting Libyan claims that Qadhafi did not have the authority to hand over the suspects.

While some diplomats said Annan would not be making the trip to the city of Sirte without assurances of a date for the bandover, others said Qadhafi was unpredictable and a deal was not yet sealed.

Annan's spokesman Fred Eckhard told BBC Radio: "There are still one or two outstanding issues and the secretary general feels that if

he can talk to President Qadhafi, maybe he can break the ice. In any case, he feels it is his obligation to try."

"We are a little bit the man in the middle in this," he added.

Libya has been under United Nations sanctions since 1992 for refusing to hand over the suspects, intelligence agents Abdul Basset Ali Mohammad Al Megrahi and Lamen Khalifa Fhimah. The men are accused by the United States and Britain of blowing up a Pan Am airliner over the Scottish town of Lockerbie in December 1988, killing 270 people.

Libya warned on Friday that Qadhafi would not be able to sign a deal to extradite the men when he met Annan.

The diplomatic editor of the official Libyan news agency JANA, which usually reflects Qadhafi's own point of view, insisted Qadhafi was not a head of state under Libya's constitution and that the only body able to decide on such matters was the Libyan people through its "popular committees."

The comment suggested that any decision to band over the suspects had to be formally approved by some 500 grassroots committees all around the country, and then by parliament.

Jim Swire, whose daughter was killed in the crash and who has led the campaign for British victims, said he was confident the two would be handed over soon.

"There is a lot of circumstantial evidence that these two are going to be banded over. I don't know when but I am convinced it is going to happen in the fairly new future."

He, like the British government, insisted that the two should be jailed in Scotland if convicted.

"I think it is right and just that if they were found guilty, they should serve their sentence in Scotland. That is where my daughter was murdered. That is where the other 269 people were also murdered," he told BBC Radio.

(Continued on page 12)

Lebanon's new cabinet drafts reform programme

BEIRUT (R) — Lebanon's new Prime Minister Selim Al Hoss met key ministers on Saturday to draft a task list for his government to carry out economic and administrative reforms.

Premier-designate Hoss held talks with President Emile Lahoud at the Baabda presidential palace, where he convened the maiden meeting of his 16-member cabinet named on Friday.

The 68-year-old premier, who this week became Lebanon's prime minister for the fifth time, then held a brainstorming session with his ministers to formulate a programme which has to win confidence from parliament before the cabinet officially takes office.

"We've got no time to talk. We've got so much work to do," new Finance Minister George Kurum told reporters en route to the weekend meeting.

His comments epitomised the work ethic that economist Hoss, appointed on Wednesday to replace longstanding premier Rafik Al Hariri, has pledged would pervade his new government.

Politicians and economists said they were encouraged by the technocrat and parliamentarian-dominated cabinet and its strong economic team, dubbing it a refreshing change from the 30-minister

Hariri government which included many militiamen.

But they said the new government's credibility hinged on its plans to bolster an economy teetering under a huge budget deficit and free decision-making from the sectarian politics that have hampered political reforms.

Parliamentary sources said the government would announce its programme by the end of next week and present it to the 128-member assembly by Dec. 15.

Veteran politician Hoss told reporters after he was chosen that his government would adopt austerity measures and a strict fiscal policy to wage war on the deficit, targeted at 42 per cent of expenditure by the end of 1998.

Hoss, well-respected across the sectarian spectrum, also reiterated Lahoud's inaugural promises to purge the government of corruption and enforce the law.

His comments reassured the country's volatile markets which had been jolted by Hariri's surprise departure and economists forecast the cabinet structure would cheer the foreign investors which Lebanon is rebuilding its economy after the devastating 1975-1990 civil war, is trying to lure.

(Continued on page 12)

Syria, Iraq renew invitation to Turkey to attend water talks

DAMASCUS (R) — Syria and Iraq on Saturday renewed their invitation to Turkey to resume three-way talks on sharing the waters of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, officials said.

Syrian Irrigation Minister Abdul Rahman Madani and his Iraqi counterpart, Mahmoud Diyab Al Ahmad, said following talks in Damascus that the invitation was open in terms of time and venue.

"We call for revival of the activities of the tripartite Syrian-Iraqi-Turkish committee," the ministers said in a press statement.

The committee was formed in 1980 with the aim of sharing the waters of the rivers.

Turkey has boycotted the talks for several years.

The Iraqi and Syrian ministers stressed that water should be used as a method to promote cooperation, friendship and peace among the three countries, one official said.

The official said that Syria and Iraq agreed during the meeting to coordinate closely in efforts aimed at reaching a permanent and final agreement with Turkey on the sharing of the two rivers.

"The water quotas should be decided in fair and reasonable way and in accordance with international law, the good neighbourly relations and the historical ties among the three countries," the official said.

Damascus and Ankara signed a provisional agreement in 1987 according to which Turkey would allow the flow of 500 cubic metres of water per second to downstream Syria.

Earlier this year, Turkey threatened to use force unless Syria halted its alleged support for the Kurdish Labour Party (PKK) seeking to establish self-rule in south-east Turkey, but the crisis eased when both signed a security agreement in which Damascus pledged not to back the PKK.

(Continued on page 12)

Iraq says UNSCOM weapons inspectors distorting facts

BAGHDAD (R) — Iraq accused a senior U.N. weapons inspector Saturday of distorting facts in a report to the Security Council in which he said inspectors were not granted access to a site they wanted to check last month.

Hussam Mobammad Amin, Iraq's liaison officer with the U.N. Special Commission (UNSCOM) inspectors, said the report by UNSCOM Deputy Chairman Charles Duelfer sought to pin the blame wrongly on Iraq for an attempted Nov. 25 inspection which was eventually called off.

Amin said a team of 12 inspectors showed up for a surprise visit at a site "belonging to one of the foreign organisations resident in Iraq."

The site was described by Duelfer as being controlled by Iranian Mujahideen rebels who have bases in Iraq. Duelfer said officials from Amin's National Monitoring Directorate told UNSCOM they could not grant access to the site.

"According to rules agreed with the Special

Commission, sites belonging to foreign agencies must have agreement between the head of the inspection team and the foreign agency," Amin said, quoted by the official Iraqi News Agency (INA).

"The Iraqi side behaved exactly in accordance with this [agreement]," Amin added.

He said the head of the inspection team held three hours of discussions with a representative of the "foreign agency" at the entrance to the site before deciding not to enter and returning to Baghdad.

"There was no intervention by the Iraqi side," Amin said.

Duelfer said in his report that UNSCOM chairman Richard Butler decided to withdraw the team of inspectors from the site and that UNSCOM then had discussions with the Iranian exiles.

Amin said Duelfer was trying to put the blame for the incident on Iraq, whose cooperation with UNSCOM is being closely monitored after it narrowly averted U.S. and British air strikes last month by pledging unconditional

cooperation.

The Iraqi News Agency said Amin "expressed his great surprise at Duelfer's insistence on distorting facts and his determination to cast the blame on Iraq."

"The Iraqi side did not prevent any inspection team from reaching the sites which the Special Commission asked to visit and it did not delay the arrival of these teams to the sites they wanted to inspect," Amin said.

Amin said the same inspection team had made 15 surprise visits to sites ranging from a fizzy

drinks firm to a company producing refrigerators.

He also refuted Duelfer's complaint in the same report that an Iraqi escort helicopter flew too close to a U.N. helicopter, saying UNSCOM had already been given a detailed explanation of the event and Iraq considered the matter closed.

Duelfer's report also referred to the discovery of a "Class I biosafety cabinet and some filter presses" that could have dual industrial and military use.

(Continued on page 12)

Arafat renews call for Palestinian state

Urges agreement with Israel on independence

STOCKHOLM (R) — Palestinian President Yasser Arafat on Saturday renewed a controversial call for a Palestinian state to be declared by May next year, saying there could be no lasting peace without its existence.

But Arafat, on a visit to Sweden, did not repeat previous pledges to unilaterally declare a state by May 4. He instead urged an agreement with Israel on Palestinian independence.

"There can be no just solution to the conflict without the agreement on the existence of two states... the state of Palestine alongside the state of Israel," he said in a speech to Sweden's parliament.

Arafat went on to say that there was an urgent need to decide the borders of a Palestinian state by the time a five-year transitional period under

the Oslo peace accords ends on May 4.

U.S. and Israeli diplomats had said earlier they hoped that he would not use his ceremonial visit to Sweden to repeat plans to unilaterally declare a Palestinian state by that deadline.

"We believe that a necessary precondition for achieving peace in the region is the recognition of both the Palestinian and Israeli peoples to the peace of the brave in the holy land of Palestine," Arafat said.

"This necessitates that every effort be made to reach an agreement and to delineate the borders of the Palestinian state before May 4, 1999," he said.

The cabinet of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, embroiled in a fresh row with Palestinian authorities, have

demanding that they pledge not to declare an independent state next May.

In Jerusalem, Palestinian officials said PLO leaders would meet in Gaza on Thursday to reaffirm that they recognise Israel's right to exist in a step towards fulfilling part of their latest interim peace deal.

Arafat, who is accompanied by a group of senior Palestinian National Authority personalities, is due to meet Meir Shitreet, parliamentary whip for Netanyahu's Likud Party, and Labour legislator Yossi Beilin during his 24-hour visit to Stockholm.

Arafat arrived in Sweden on a visit marking the 10th anniversary of his renunciation of violence and recognition of Israel, a landmark step which Swedish negotiation helped to bring about.



ECEVIT MEETS WITH YILMAZ IN ANKARA: Bulent Ecevit, leader of the Democratic Leftist Party (R), shakes hands Saturday with the former Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz, leader of the Motherland Party. Both leaders met for talks after Ecevit was asked by President Suleyman Demirel to form the next Turkish government on Dec. 2 (Reuters photo)

Turkish Cypriots prepare to vote in parliamentary polls

ANKARA (DPA) — Voters in the Turkish-held north of the divided island of Cyprus were preparing Saturday aimed a heated campaign to go to the polls on Sunday.

More than 120,000 Turkish Cypriots are expected to turn out to choose between 352 candidates for the 50-seat parliament of the 15-

year-old breakaway Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC).

Sunday's elections are being run for the first time under a proportional representation voting system, making predictions of the results more complex.

According to recent public surveys, opposition centre-left parties are expected

to do well, and could force current Prime Minister Dervis Eroglu to choose one of them as his coalition partner.

Eroglu is now allied with the party of Serdar Denktaş, whose father Rauf Denktaş is the leader of Turkish Cyprus.

The position of Serdar Denktaş' party could be

shaken, the Turkish Cumhuriyet newspaper wrote.

Denktash and his father Rauf, who leads foreign policy in the enclave, refuse to negotiate with the Greek Cypriot south of the island until their authority is recognised as a state.

As parliament has only an advisory role in foreign

policy, the elections are not expected to spell a major change in the TRNC's Ankara-dependent stance on the Cyprus issue.

Cyprus has been divided into a Turkish community in the north and a Greek one in the south since the 1974 Turkish intervention after an Athens-backed coup.

Seminar calls for integration of music into early education

By Susan Resheq

AMMAN — Educationalists on Tuesday called for the introduction of music into kindergartens and nurseries across the region to help enhance students' future academic capabilities and learning skills.

They were speaking at the start of a three-day seminar focusing on plans to set up a regional music training centre for nursery and kindergarten teachers working in Arab countries.

Children, whose lives have become increasingly linked with complex electronics and globalisation through the "information highway," should be provided with some tools and skills to help them cope with the changing times, they added.

Children also needed to know who they are, where they come from and how to find joy through discovering art, music, literature and nature, the educationalists agreed.

The Amman meeting was organised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the Ministry of Education, the Noor Al Hussein Foundation, and the Arab

Academy of Music.

Marin Hadlow, director of UNESCO's Jordan office, said the U.N. agency is focusing on the concept of "life-long education" to ensure that "our lives are in balance and that we do not neglect the cultural and artistic side of our personalities, no matter how young or old we are."

"It is a pleasure for me to be here today amongst people who recognise that children from an early age need to be exposed to their culture and especially to that 'international language' — music," Hadlow added.

He said educationalists and teachers had a crucial role to play in the development of future society, adding that music played a key role in reaching that goal.

Music could be used to "teach a child new skills, to encourage the child to explore... and to be a bridge between cultures, religions and races," according to Hadlow.

Hadlow said UNESCO would encourage the seminar's efforts and any plan of action it might devise.

Mahmoud Tawalbeh, acting secretary general of the Education Ministry, said Arab coun-

tries implemented a strategy in the 1980s to focus on early childhood.

"The early stage in children's lives is the most critical in their development, as the broad elements of their characters are defined and they acquire basic skills that enable them to react to their society and to nature," he said in a speech delivered on behalf of Education Minister Fawzi Gharaibeh.

"Hence the need to focus on early childhood and to care for developing children's mental, physical and emotional capabilities," he added.

Tawalbeh said that music should be used in kindergartens and nurseries and that teachers should be trained in music education.

"Music is important in the life of mankind, [and] therefore care is given to music education through which one can reach noble educational goals," Tawalbeh explained.

"It also helps mankind develop feelings, fine taste, mental capabilities and skills of movement."

Participants from Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan, Syria, Palestine, Lebanon and Mauritania are attending the seminar.

Biblical Nazareth replica project begins

By Karin Laub
The Associated Press

NAZARETH — Kneeling on a slope in Jesus' hometown, volunteers from an American church gently firmed rock on limestone rock and filled in cracks with a mortar of mud.

The result of a day's labour was a ragged, knee-high wall lining an agricultural terrace — a common sight in the Middle East, where farmers since biblical times have had to plant on rocky hills.

But this wall was special.

It marked the start of a \$64 million project, largely financed by American donations, to build a replica of a biblical-era village and farm in the heart of Nazareth, where tradition says Christ spent much of his life.

In time for the millennium, visitors will be able to stroll along donkey paths into an ancient village of one-room stone houses and courtyards, and mingle with actors playing 1st-century housewives and farmers.

Or they can follow a "parable walk," accompanied by storytellers in period costume who will relay news of Jesus as a contemporary. For the devout, there will be a holy communion, a foot washing or a reading from the Bible.

Project organisers say they want to bring Jesus and his teachings to life in historical context, something a standard

tour of the Holy Land often fails to deliver.

"You can see only so many archaeological sites before you don't know anymore what you are seeing and are not moved by it," said Joel Kaufman, programme director of Nazareth Village, a not-for-profit association of professional artists and businesspeople whose honorary chairman is former U.S. President Jimmy Carter.

In modern Nazareth — a noisy, congested city of 60,000 whose main attraction is the 1950s Church of the Annunciation — that connection to the biblical past is especially difficult to make.

Jackhammers are tearing up the city centre as \$80 million is being spent on widening streets and building 1,000 hotel rooms in preparation for an expected four million tourists in 2000.

But the work is behind schedule and ambitious plans for a large stadium, a civic auditorium and an additional 1,500 hotel rooms have been dropped.

A new snag arose after November municipal elections. In the mainly Arab town that is 70 per cent Muslim and 30 per cent Christian, the Islamist movement for the first time won a majority on the city council. The Christian mayor, Ramez Jeraisi, was barely reelected.

Topping the Islamists' agenda is the construction of a mosque right next to the Church of the Annunciation, on a spot where city planners had hoped to

build a Venetian-style plaza for tourists. The dispute is in court and the plaza is on hold.

The election outcome worries some Nazarenes, who fear a new emphasis on religious alignment is emerging in a town that has long prided itself on tolerance.

Mindful of the tensions, the planners of Nazareth Village decided to get the community involved from the start.

"We're not high-powered Westerners coming in and creating a theme park, a place whose sole purpose is to make money," said Michael Hostetler, the executive director of Nazareth Village and an employee of the Meunonite Board of Missions in Elkhart, Ind.

On a recent Saturday, 360 local volunteers launched the project by clearing thorny bushes covering the 12-acre plot that is part of the grounds of a hospital run by the Edinburgh Medical Missionary Society of Scotland.

Muslim girls wearing traditional headscarves worked alongside Christian teenagers in jeans and T-shirts and a dozen volunteers from the United Methodist Church in Gulf Breeze, Fla. Local grocers donated food for a picnic lunch.

By the end of the day, the brush was cleared, laying bare the terraces of a 1st-century farm. Later will come orchards of olive, fig and plum trees. An earlier archaeological dig yielded a quarry,

watch tower bases, stone irrigation channels and a wine press — a level area cut from limestone for squeezing grapes and a vat below for collecting juice.

Frieda Brothman, a 67-year-old retired nurse from Gulf Breeze, Fla., who was dusty from hauling underbrush, said the work helped strengthen her faith.

"It was a joy to get something started that the rest of the world will see someday and know this is where Jesus walked and lived," she said.

It is believed that biblical Nazareth, where Jesus spent much of his life, consisted of only about 35 homes spread over six acres.

By 2000, Hostetler hopes to have the first six or seven homes built and open the site to visitors. The work will then become part of the attraction, with builders in biblical dress transporting materials — all strictly 1st-century — using donkeys.

The "parable walk" will weave through the village and the farm and use existing sites to illustrate New Testament stories.

For example, visitors might pause at a terrace and hear the purble of the farmer who saw some of his seeds go to waste because they fell on rocky ground.

The story might make little sense to visitors used to vast stretches of fertile land in other parts of the world, Hostetler said.

U.S. official starts visit to Lebanon

BEIRUT (DPA) — U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala began a three-day visit to Lebanon on Saturday by touring the north of the country.

"I will be telling the president of Lebanon how enthusiastic we are about the new government," she said.

Shalala, who is of Lebanese descent, cut the ribbon to open a public school in the village of Tleil in the remote district of Akkar, as a "symbol," and an example of how the American government may support Lebanon.

The school was completely

rebuilt by a U.S. non-governmental organisation with a grant of \$200,000 from the U.S. Agency for International Development, USAID.

Shalala is due to meet President Emile Lahoud, Prime Minister Salim Hoss and House Speaker Nabih Berri on Monday.

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel. 4773111-19

PROGRAMME TWO

15:10 Cartoon — The Pink Panther
15:20 The Pumpkin Patch
15:30 The Adventure of the Black Stallion
16:00 Doc — Big Cat Diary
16:30 Entertainment — Vid Kids
17:00 The American Chart Show
18:15 French Programme — Un Jeune Homme Vert
19:00 Le Journal
19:15 French Programme
19:30 News Headlines
19:33 Comedy — The Brits Empire
20:00 French programme — Afrique
20:30 Drama — Walker, Texas Ranger
21:15 Doc — Farming and Ecology
21:30 Behind the Scenes
22:00 News in English
22:30 Mini-series — Melissa
23:10 Drama — Doogie Houser
23:59 End of T.X.

PRAYER TIMES

04:55 Fajr
06:17 Sunrise/Duba
11:27 Dhuhr
14:13 Asr
16:36 Maghreb
17:58 Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church
Sweithel, Tel. 5920740
Assemblies of God Church Tel.
4633785
St. Joseph Church Tel. 4624590

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

Terra Sancta Church

Tel. 4622366

Anglican Church

Tel. 4624853/4624811

St. Afrem Syrian Orthodox Church

Tel. 4771751

Amman International Church

Tel. 5865897

German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel.

5688404

The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel.

5811295

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Tel.

4654932

St. John the Baptist at De la Salle College Tel.

5661757

Church of the Annunciation Tel.

4637440

Greek Orthodox Church Tel.

4646138

Church of Presentation, Sweithel Tel.

5920146

The United Catholic Church Tel.

4624757

The English-Language Catholic Parish Tel.

4614190

Evangelical Free Church Tel.

4892679

The Baptist Church Tel.

4628052

The Armenian Catholic Church Tel.

4771331

The Armenian Orthodox Church Tel.

4775261

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology
Temperatures are expected to rise

slightly with clouds appearing at

different altitudes and winds

southeasterly light to moderate. In

Aqaba, winds will be northerly

moderate and seas calm.

Min./Max. temp.

Amman... 11/22

Aqaba... 15/28

Deserts... 08/24

Jordan Valley... 15/27

Yesterday's high temperatures:

Amman 20, Aqaba 26 Humidity

readings: Amman 40 per cent,

Aqaba 36 per cent.

Following are the temperatures

expected today in the following

areas:

Ajloun... 08/17

Jerash... 10/22

Um Qays... 10/21

Madaba... 08/20

Petra... 10/20

Dead Sea... 14/27

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:

Dr. Abdul Rahim Mustafa 4744685

Dr. Issam Asmar... 5890504

Dr. Mohammad Abdul Su'ad

5693372

Dr. Nidal As'ad... 4751672

AMMAN:

Telephone Information (directory

assistance)... 121

Overseas Calls... 0132

Firas Pharmacy

5661912

Al Salam Pharmacy

4636730

Mayadah Pharmacy

5537004

Rukn Al Dawa Pharmacy

5536169

IRBID:

Dr. Ali Shuqairi... 027100069

Fou'ad Pharmacy... 021275360

ZARQA:

Dr. Randa Shahin... 09995710

Palestine Pharmacy... 09983562

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre... 4637111

Civil Defence Department... 5661111

Civil Defence Immediate Rescue

4630341

Civil Defence Emergency... 199

Rescue Police 192.462111.463777

Fire Brigade... 4661701

Blood Bank... 4753121

Highway Police... 5343402

Traffic Police... 4896390

Public Security Dept... 4891611/15

Hotel Complaints... 5605800

Price Complaints... 5661176

Water & Sewage Complaints... 4897467

Amman Municipality Complaints

J. Electricity Authority

5815615

Electric Power Co.

4636381

RJ Flight Information

44-53200

Queen Alia Int. Airport

44-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:

The Arab Centre for Heart and

Special Surgery... 5921199

The Islamic, Abdi... 5666131/7

Hussein Medical Centre... 5856856

Luzmila... 4630195

Khalidi Maternity... 4644281/6

Akileh Maternity... 4642441/2

Jabal Amman Maternity... 4642362

Malhas, J. Amman... 4636140

Report on press law prompts government's first response to concerns

PPD director criticises report, submitted to European Parliament, for 'inaccuracies'

By Amy Henderson

AMMAN — A highly critical report on Jordan's new press and publications law presented to the European Parliament last month by a local human rights activist has put the government on the defensive, prompting its first response to international allegations that the law is a violation of human rights.

Hayd Qattan, director of the Press and Publications Department, told the Jordan Times last night that the government felt it appropriate to respond to the report's allegations since, he said, both the organisations who sponsored the report and the European Parliament denied Jordan an opportunity to respond either in the report or at the European Parliament's Nov. 18 session.

"We responded because the human rights groups

depended on one source and did not invite any other person to participate in the discussion, to the extent that the ambassador to Brussels, Omayya Touqan, present at Strasbourg, was denied the right to respond," Qattan said. "We were very surprised by that."

"I'm sick of people lying about this law," Qattan said. "Especially [the accusations] that it permits pre-trial detention. Pre-trial detention was permitted in this law, nor does it exist anywhere in the law of the land that a violation of law related to freedom of expression allows a journalist to be detained."

The document, drafted by Sa'eda Kilani, a former journalist, included a recommendation to cease the "pre-trial detention of journalists for their professional

activities."

The report was sponsored by leading international press freedoms groups: the Middle East-North Africa Centre for Media Freedom, the Committee to Protect Journalists, the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network, the International Federation of Human Rights, Human Rights Watch and Reporters Sans Frontières, most of whom issued repeated strong publicised appeals to both Parliament and the government to stop the enactment of the legislation, endorsed by the Lower House in August. The previous government, under which the law was endorsed, never publicly responded to human rights groups' concerns.

In his five-page report addressed to the six human rights organisations which supported Kilani's criticism,

Qattan said the report contained "several inaccuracies, extremely one-sided views based on flawed research and several instances where articles of the [1998] Press and Publications Law passed by the Jordanian Parliament in August were mis-translated."

Kilani, who late last year wrote a scathing report on the government's 1997 temporary amendments to the 1993 Press and Publications Law for the London-based Article XIX, included the ensuing forced closure of 13 weekly newspapers ahead of the November 1997 parliamentary elections in her most recent document.

She also discussed the decision of the Higher Court of Justice, presided over then by Judge Farouq Kilani, to overturn the amendments and his subsequent dismissal from his position in the judiciary,

which many believe was a consequence of his ruling against the amendments.

Qattan also asked whether the rights groups found it a "coincidence that the former head of the judicial council happens to be [Kilani's] father? And if not, does this not [cast] serious doubt on the credibility and objectivity of the author?"

During an audience with the EP, she said that "Jordan had breached her international obligations and violated her own Constitution and National Charter by promulgating a press law that severely restricts freedom of expression [by] granting authorities broad powers over the press, limiting access to all types of information and restricting the activities of independent research institutes."

In his written response, Qattan said it was a "pity that [the organisations]

relied on information from one source and only one source."

"A more balanced approach that took into account other points of view may have been more appropriate for such distinguished groups that protect and advocate freedom of speech," Qattan wrote. "It is of serious concern [to Jordan] that in the introduction to the report, the executive director of EMHRN regards all the information provided by this one source as facts, without, it seems, making the effort to check the validity of the information provided."

Qattan described remarks that Jordan had violated her Constitution and National Charter as a "direct challenge to Parliament's authority and an insult to the Jordanian electorate."

The former government of Abdul Salam Majali drafted

the 1998 press law, which was later submitted to Parliament and subject to weeks of debate and closed-door parliamentary hearings. The law was passed with 38 votes in the 80-seat Lower House.

Kilani in her report said that the present government, formed in August, "has committed itself to a soft application of the law" but doubted whether the executive would be able to apply the law "leniently," a claim that Qattan said is unsubstantiated, considering that the government dropped charges against more than 20 newspapers after the Cabinet took office and initiated an ongoing dialogue with the Jordan Press Association.

However, Kilani yesterday said the government's recent requests to newspapers to rectify their financial situations in accordance with the

law and instructions to newspapers to refrain from coverage of ongoing investigations into vital national issues such as the committee investigating the water scandal and the case against the former head of the National Aid Fund accused of embezzlement, do not show a soft application of the law.

"This itself is against free press and the public right to know," she said.

The government argues that the law, having passed constitutional channels, is simply law, and that it is struggling to find the most flexible implementation possible.

"There are only two papers that have not rectified their financial situation, but they are on their way to doing that, and the government is trying to help find ways to guarantee them financially," Qattan said.

NEWS IN BRIEF

French to be offered during tawjihi

AMMAN (J.T.) — Students from one public and two private schools will be tested on the French language during the 1998-1999 tawjihi exams, the first time the subject has been offered as part of the high school graduation exam, an administrator said Saturday. "Nine students from the Rosary and Nazareth private schools as well as a government school will be tested on French," said an administrator from the French Cultural Centre, who requested anonymity. Ministry of Education officials confirmed the report but declined to give further details. The administrator could not identify the name of the government school offering the exam. Around 7,000 students at public schools and 30,000 students at 120 private schools study the French language, according to French Cultural Centre figures. The French Cultural Centre and the French embassy in Amman help the Ministry of Education train French teachers at public schools and assist in developing syllabi, said the official. Students use a French textbook especially prepared for Jordanian students.

RJ, Yemenia sign agreement

AMMAN (Petra) — Royal Jordanian and Yemenia, the national airline of Yemen, Saturday signed an agreement on cooperation in training personnel on passenger, supply and cargo services. Hassan Matar, RJ assistant deputy director for training, said the two sides studied and approved plans for cooperation and coordination in civil aviation and air transport. The two sides also discussed exchanging expertise and organising joint seminars on civil aviation.

PM meets with American academician

AMMAN (Petra) — Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh Saturday met with the president of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Robert Satloff, to discuss several regional and bilateral issues and Jordan's role in establishing peace in the region. During the meeting, Tarawneh stressed the Kingdom's role in supporting the peace process to avoid more wars. Satloff said he exchanged viewpoints with Tarawneh on these topics and reviewed recent Palestinian-Israeli negotiations on the implementation of the Wye River accord.

Bilalji leaves for Petra expo

AMMAN (Petra) — Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Akel Bilalji leaves today for Washington to attend the opening of an exhibition entitled "Petra: The Jordanian City Carved from Rock," organised by National Geographic. The event, which will last until Feb. 7, will include photos and antiquity displays from Petra. The ministry, the Department of Antiquities, the Petra National Trust and the Badia Research and Development Programme are participating in the exhibition.

Electric grid connection postponed

AMMAN (Petra) — The Jordanian-Egyptian electric grid connection project will not be launched next Thursday, the date originally scheduled for the official inauguration of the project, Egyptian Ambassador to Jordan Hani Riyad announced Saturday.

what's going on

FILEM
• "Le femme infidèle" at the French Cultural Centre on Monday Nov. 7 at 6:30 p.m. and 8:30 p.m.

ANNUAL CHOIR
• Annual Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) choir at the Royal Cultural Centre on Monday Dec. 7 at 8:00 p.m. (daily until Dec. 10).

LECTURES
• "Learning Law in Germany" (in Arabic) by Dr. Omayya Olwan at the Applied Science University (Time of lecture to be checked at the university).

• "The Contemporary Problems of International Trade Arbitration" (in Arabic) by Dr. Omayya Olwan at the Applied Science University on Monday Dec. 7 (Time of lecture to be checked at the university).

• "In Which Direction Does Jordan Move Environmentally?" (in Arabic) by Mr. Ahmad Obeidat at the Orthodox Club, Abdoun at 7:00 p.m.

SLIDE SHOW
• Slide show on the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN) activities in Dana and Azraq in addition to plans in Wadi Rum at the RSCN premises (6:00 p.m.-9:00 p.m.). (Tel. 5337931/2).

EXHIBITIONS
• Photography exhibition "Emprints" (a photography trip from Morocco to Turkey) at the French Cultural Centre, Jabel Amman, until Dec. 17.

• Works of 17 British artists and painters from the Nineteenth Century at the British Council, Jabel Amman, until Dec. 10.

• Oil paintings by Ali Najjar at Instituto Cervantes, Jabel Amman, until Dec. 14.

• The Tenth Anniversary Exhibition of Contemporary Arab Artists at the Arab Cultural Centre, Jabel Amman, until Jan. 28.

• Photography exhibition entitled "Windows and Doors" by Hani Khoury at Baladina Art Gallery, Gardens Street (Tel. 5537598), until Dec. 15.

Maher Musa Aqrabawi and RJ personnel following his arrival in Amman (Photo courtesy of Royal Jordanian)

RJ passenger returns to Amman following treatment in Ireland

AMMAN (J.T.) — Maher Musa Aqrabawi, a Royal Jordanian passenger whose sudden airborne illness led to the plane being diverted to Dublin airport during a Chicago-Amman flight last week, is back in Amman after receiving medical treatment at a Dublin hospital.

RJ Vice President for Commercial Affairs Majdi Sabri said following the incident that the crew on board provided Aqrabawi with first aid until the captain made an emergency landing in Dublin, where the man was accompanied by one of the crew members to hospital.

"I was not aware of what

happened during the flight, and I only recovered consciousness in the hospital," said Aqrabawi, a Jordanian citizen.

According to Sabri, Aqrabawi had felt dizzy and started to sweat during the flight, which prompted the crew's immediate action.

"The care I received from the RJ staff made me realise the importance of our national airline, whose crew are keen on providing all possible care to passengers regardless of the cost, which in this case entailed diversion of the plane to another destination," said Aqrabawi who, along with his family members, voiced grati-

tude and appreciation of the national airline and the Jordanian ambassador in London.

"It was RJ's prompt action, in a manner that embodies His Majesty King Hussein's slogan 'Jordanian citizens are our most precious treasures', that saved my life," added Aqrabawi, who returned Thursday to Amman. He was met at Queen Alia International Airport by RJ Assistant Vice President for Airport Services Mutha Majali along with other RJ staff.

According to Sabri, in such emergency situations RJ crew are instructed to land at the nearest airport to provide essential medical services.

First Palestine Airlines plane lands in Jordan

AMMAN (DPA) — After a three-and-a-half-hour delay, a Palestine Airlines plane landed Saturday at Marka Airport on its first commercial flight from the newly opened Gaza International Airport.

All 45 passengers aboard the Fokker-50 — one Canadian and the others Palestinians with Jordanian passports — complained of time-consuming security checks.

The checks were carried out both by the Palestinians at the airport and then

by the Israelis at the Rafah border post with Egypt, where the passengers were taken by bus before being returned to the airport to begin their flight to Jordan.

The flight was the first of a planned two flights a week to Amman.

Despite the delay, passengers said they were thrilled to arrive in Amman after a 90-minute flight, a trip which would take them about 20 hours by land as they would have to go through Israel.

The Gaza airport was opened on Nov. 24, one of the first manifestations of statehood for the Palestinians, who say they will have an independent state by May 1999.

The plane returned to Gaza after a stopover of an hour, carrying 45 passengers.

The new Palestinian carrier has two Fokker-50 aircraft donated by the Dutch government and a Boeing 727 donated by Saudi millionaire businessman Prince Al Walid Bin Talal.

Government plans spot checks against illegal foreign labour

By Mohammad Ben Hussein

AMMAN — The government campaign against foreign labour will intensify this week when police start spot-checking at certain places employing foreigners, an official said Saturday.

"Police and Labour Ministry officials will launch a nationwide campaign against foreign labourers working as gas station attendants, mechanics, guards and messengers," an official from police public relations, who did not wish to be identified, said.

He said the campaign aims at forcing illegal workers to rectify their status rather than at deporting

them.

According to Labour Ministry figures, 110,000 foreigners have so far adjusted their situation by obtaining work permits.

Interior Minister Nayef Qadi has estimated that Jordan may be hosting up to one million foreigners.

"Foreigners are flocking to the [labour] ministry's offices to legalise their residency in the country, an average of 500 people a day," said Bahjat Kuteishat, head of the Labour Ministry Employment Department. He added that Egyptians top the list of those who have rectified their status followed by Syrians and other nationalities, including

Arabs, Africans and Asians.

Labour Ministry Mahdi Farhan told the Jordan Times earlier this week that the ministry would start activating some articles of the labour law in order to force employers to obtain work permits for their employees.

According to the labour law, employers face a penalty of a minimum of JD50 for every month or part thereof for every non-Jordanian employed in a manner which is in violation of the labour law.

Unemployment in Jordan is officially estimated at around 16 per cent and unofficially at around 27 per cent.

Belgian dance film, German family comedy entertaining picks

By Dima Hamdan

AMMAN — Rosas dances Rosas, a Belgian choreography, was the second film to be shown at the 10th European Film Festival, currently being held at the Royal Cultural Centre. Rosas dances Rosas was based on choreography by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, and was winner of the first prize of the International Video Dance Prize/Carina Ari in Stockholm.

The entire show revolves around conflict, consisting of four sketches in which dancers fight amongst themselves and with the surroundings against an exotic yet disturbing musical background. The first sketch begins with four dancers, performing to the sound of their own rhythmic sighs. As the show develops, several dancers join in, while the pace gradually increases to a maximum and becomes more engaging. All the elements are minimal and abstract, thus creating perfect harmony and giving more focus to the brilliant performance of the dancers. The sketches were shot during different times of the day, using minimal artificial lighting. Costumes were basic and unified in order to eliminate the individuality of the characters. But what I found most fascinating was the set of this show: a building designed by

Henri van der Velde, a famous architect.

The great space and enormous windows gave a better dimension to the performance. Shots were taken from angles thus creating a variety of focal points and even showing the dancers as if they were trapped in a maze. The film's only drawback was its length, which included a significant amount of repetition. Although probably crucial to the plot, the repetition was irritating nonetheless. All in all, however, the show was remarkable, very intense and engaging.

The third film, Nach Funf in Urwald (It's a jungle out there), is a domestic story that deals with the typical issue of families and the troubles of adolescence in a comic manner. Wolfgang, the head of a family, runs a campaign to become a mayor of a small German town, which entails demonstrating a perfect and well-disciplined household.

One evening, Anna, his 17-year-old daughter, has a party, which creates a chaotic mess in the house. Her father is very upset, especially after one of his favourite records is broken, and after a big fight, Anna decides to leave for Munich and become a singer. She meets Simon, her shy friend, who gives her a lift to Munich with the excuse that he's going to meet friends.

A scene from Rosas dances Rosas

Both the parents of Anna and Simon meet in Munich in a disco while searching for them and return home that same evening where they smoke, drink and admit their own adolescent experiences, for which they are punishing their children.

During that time, Anna and Simon encounter a variety of problems and realise they are not yet ready to face the world. They meet later that evening and decide to return home, where

Anna finds that her parents caused a great mess in the house, similar to what she had caused in her party. Each admitting his own mistake, Anna trades her guitar to buy her father a copy of the destroyed record, and the father becomes more lenient and wiser in dealing with his daughter.

Even though it is a repetitive story, this version is light, funny, and subtle, qualities seldom seen in domestic film comedies.

Mulki, British water minister open seminar today

AMMAN (J.T.) — Minister of Water and Energy Hani Mulki and visiting British water minister, Alan Meale, open a seminar today on water issues at the InterContinental Hotel.

The meeting aims at activating the private sector's participation in water projects, reviewing British experience in privatising the water and wastewater treatment sectors and highlighting investment opportunities in such fields.

Following the discussions, a series of workshops will be held on partnership between the public and private sectors, wastewater recycling and treatment, and operations and management.

Earlier Saturday, Meale, who arrived in Amman yesterday with a 14-member delegation for a four-day official visit, met with Minister of Transport and Public Works Nasser Lawzi, Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs and the Environment Tawfiq Kreishan and officials from the Jordan Valley and Water authorities.

Last of Cambodia's Khmer Rouge give up

PHNOM PENH (R) — The last Khmer Rouge fighters have surrendered to the Cambodian government, isolating their fugitive leaders and ending the radical group's 20-year-long war against the government, army commanders said Saturday.

Eight top commanders and their men agreed to give up their fight after four hours of talks at a temple on northern Cambodia's border with Thailand Friday, they said.

"These are the last commanders of the Khmer Rouge. They represent the Khmer Rouge across the country. It's the end of the Khmer Rouge," said General Meas Sophea, deputy armed forces chief.

"We held negotiations with them at Preah Vihear temple yesterday. They agreed to defect and join the government," Meas Sophea told Reuters. "They defected unconditionally."

The men commanded the last Khmer Rouge forces based in pockets along the Thai-Cambodian border. In all about 500 fighters he said would be integrated into the government army.

More than 20,000 civilians, most now in refugee camps in Thailand, were also under the command of the men.

The Khmer Rouge, held responsible for the deaths of about 1.7 million people during their 1975 to 1979 rule, were forced from power by a Vietnamese invasion in early 1979 and have battled the Phnom Penh government ever since.

Khmer Rouge military chief and leader Ta Mok, political chief Khieu

Samphan and top ideologue Nuon Chea were still at large somewhere along the Thai border. Meas Sophea said.

"We can't find them on Cambodian territory. They must be somewhere along the border," he said. It was not known how many men the three top leaders still controlled, he said.

Among the group who surrendered was Khem Nguon, Ta Mok's chief of staff, and Non Nou, who is believed to be Ta Mok's top money man. Military men Dul Saroun, Khim Them, Lem Phan and a son-in-law in law of Ta Mok, Meas Muth, also surrendered.

Most of them are believed to be in their late forties.

Khem Nguon said in a statement that he and his colleagues had broken with the three top Khmer Rouge leaders whom he branded criminal.

"We've stopped believing the deception of leaders Nuon Chea, Ta Mok and Khieu Samphan who are criminals," Khem Nguon said in the statement which was apparently video taped after Friday's negotiations and broadcast on national television.

"From now on we will follow the government's political platform and the constitution and respect the orders of the government armed forces," he said.

Jem Phan said the decision to defect was made after the formation of a new government on November 30. He promised they would be neutral and not align themselves with any political party.

Competition between co-

prime ministers Hun Sen and Prince Norodom Ranariddh over the allegiance of defecting Khmer Rouge units was one of the factors which led to the bloody collapse of their government in July last year.

The Khmer Rouge has been crippled by mass defections, infighting and government offensives in recent years and analysts said the commanders had little choice but to give up.

"They had no choice, nowhere to go," said one diplomat who has monitored the group. "They've ceased to be a credible threat to the government for some time."

The surrender will lend weight to calls for the new government to reap the peace dividend and divert funds away from security into more productive sectors. The government has been spending up to 50 per cent of its budget on security.

Notorious Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot was purged by his comrades last year and died in a northern rebel zone, apparently from a heart attack on April 15.

The United Nations recently sent a team of international jurists to Cambodia assess evidence against Khmer Rouge leaders for a possible international tribunal. The team is due to present its findings to U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan in January.

Prime Minister Hun Sen has said Pol Pot's three top comrades — Ta Mok, Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea — must face trial, but lower-ranking members of the group were welcome to defect to the government.



Nigerians queue to vote in local elections in Lagos. The elections are the first under military ruler General Abdulsalam Abubakar's programme to restore civilian rule by May 1999 (Reuters photo)

Relaxed start to Nigerian local elections

LAGOS (R) — Nigerians dawdled to polling stations Saturday for local elections which mark the first stage of the military ruler's plan to restore civilian rule next May.

Military ruler General Abdulsalam Abubakar urged a big turnout to usher in democracy to the West African country of at least 108 million which has been ruled by soldiers for all but 10 years since independence from Britain in 1960.

"So far we've had about 50 of the 500 or so who have registered here. We expect the others to come soon," said Funke Esan, an official at one of the polling stations in the crumbling, colonial heart of Lagos.

After voters have had their cards stamped they must cast their secret ballots together from 1030 GMT to prevent cheating — the electoral commission suspects as many as a third of more than 50 million names on the voters' register are false.

The votes will be counted immediately and each voting centre is to announce its own result.

Securing a big vote with broad national distribution is vital for the nine parties contesting posts in 774 local government councils. Only those winning five per cent in two-thirds of Nigeria's 36 states will be eligible for

next year's parliamentary and presidential elections.

Despite reports of clashes between party supporters in which at least one man was killed, the Independent National Electoral Commission says it expects an orderly poll in which rigging will be difficult.

Land borders with Benin, Cameroon and Niger closed Friday to stop politicians sneaking foreigners into Nigeria to vote.

"Everything has been prepared. Because of the process we have adopted I don't believe cheating will be possible," commission spokesman Steve Osemeke told Reuters.

There will be no voting in several areas where registration could not take place. They include parts of the oil-rich Niger Delta where ethnic Ijaw youths have threatened to disrupt the vote if local government boundaries are not changed.

A higher turnout is expected than for elections held under late dictator Sani Abacha — whose discredited democracy plan was cut short by his sudden death in June.

But although there were reports of enthusiasm in some northern cities, there was no sign of the disappearance of the cynicism which has characterised ballots since the army annulled

elections in 1993 regarded as some of the freest in Nigeria's history.

"Why should I vote? What's the point? Who am I going to vote for? It won't change anything," said Segun Agboola, one of many youths who pick up odd jobs on the streets of Lagos.

Among several dozen foreign observers for Saturday's poll is a team from the Commonwealth that suspended Nigeria in 1995 after Abacha ordered the execution of author Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other activists.

Favourites to win the largest number of seats are the People Democratic Party and All Peoples Party which together group most of Nigeria's political heavyweights.

The Alliance for Democracy is expected to do well in the southwest, which has felt cheated since the 1993 presidential elections were annulled as local tycoon Moshood Abiola was poised to win. Abiola died in detention in July.

"I urge all Nigerians to seize this opportunity offered them in the true spirit of democracy to come out en masse to participate in the elections," Abubakar said. "I would like to appeal to the politicians to play the game by the rules."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Pinochet lawyers seek to overturn decision-report

LONDON (R) — Augusto Pinochet's lawyers are seeking to overturn the ruling against the former Chilean dictator because of bias, the Guardian newspaper reported Saturday. They are seeking an annulment because the wife of one of the law lords in Britain's highest court works for Amnesty International, the human rights pressure group. Gillian Hoffman, is the wife of Lord Hoffman, who cast the deciding vote in the 3-2 ruling that Pinochet was not immune from prosecution. Pinochet was arrested in London on Oct. 16 on a warrant from Spain charging him with responsibility in the deaths or disappearances of over 3,000 people during his 1973-1990 rule. He was bailed last month on condition he remain under police guard and is currently living in a luxury rented mansion outside London. Home Secretary Jack Straw will decide by Dec. 11 whether the extradition process can go forward. The Guardian, citing Chilean sources, said that bias claims over Lady Hoffman's position as an administrative assistant at Amnesty International have been made to the Home Office (Interior Minister) by Pinochet's lawyer, Kingsley Knappley. But leading human rights lawyer Geoffrey Robertson said that any suggestion of bias was preposterous. "Pinochet's lawyers were given ample opportunity to object to any of the judges before the hearing," he told The Guardian. A spokesman for Amnesty International also ridiculed the bias suggestion, saying: "If the Pinochet legal team have got to the stage where they are now pursuing this, they are clearly grasping at straws."

'Police kill 13 suspected Maoists in Nepal'

KATHMANDU (R) — Nepali police gunned down 13 suspected members of an extreme communist Maoist group opposing the Himalayan kingdom's constitutional monarchy, a local newspaper said Saturday. Nepali daily Kantipur said eight people were killed in three incidents in Rolpa district, in western Nepal, Thursday and five in neighbouring Salyan district Wednesday. There was no immediate official confirmation available of the incidents and the newspaper gave no further details about the gunbattles. The last toll takes to 28 the number of people killed in a week in gunbattles between police and the Maoists after the Nepal government announced local council polls for Dec. 18. Local council elections were postponed in four districts in 1997 after the Maoists called for a boycott of the vote and threatened candidates not to contest. Apart from Rolpa and Salyan, neighbouring districts of Jajarkot and Rukum have also been hotbeds of insurgency led by the Maoist Communist Party of Nepal. More than 350 people have been killed in the Maoist rebellion and in police action since the trouble began in February 1996. The Nepali government has been criticised by opposition parties and human rights groups for its handling of the Maoist problem.

South Carolina executes half brothers for 1977 murder

COLUMBIA, S.C. (R) — Two half-brothers who spent 21 years on South Carolina's death row for murdering a petrol station attendant in 1977 were put to death by lethal injection Friday, a prison spokesman said. Larry Gilbert, 42, died at 2337 GMT and J.D. Gleaton, 53, died at 0016 GMT after they were injected one after the other with a dose of lethal chemicals in the execution chamber of the Broad River state prison, spokesman John Barkley said. The executions, the first multiple execution here since 1939, were carried out hours after the U.S. Supreme Court rejected the inmates' final appeal, and one day after South Carolina Governor David Beasley refused to grant the men clemency. The executions were the first of six scheduled over the next seven weeks in South Carolina. South Carolina has executed five people this year and 18 since the U.S. Supreme Court reinstated capital punishment in 1976. Gilbert and Gleaton were sentenced to die for murdering service station attendant Ralph Stoudemire during a July 1977 robbery in South Congaree, near Columbia, less than two months after state legislators reinstated the death sentence. Stoudemire's widow, Betty Stoudemire Slusher, stood outside the Broad River state prison with people who gathered for a candlelight vigil. Some among the crowd opposed the death penalty and others favoured the executions. The executions drew protests from Amnesty International, the American Civil Liberties Union, the state chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, and state religious leaders.

'Body armour' causes Texas prison escapee to drown

HUNTSVILLE, Texas (R) — The same makeshift body armour that helped a condemned killer escape from Texas' death row dragged him to his death just a few minutes later when he sank to the bottom of a river and drowned, officials said Friday. An autopsy on the body of Martin Gurule, 29 — who escaped from the Ellis Unit prison in Huntsville just after midnight on Nov. 27 — found that he was so weighted down by extra clothes and magazines and cardboard strapped to his body that he could not stay afloat when he jumped into a river near the prison. Using elastic bandages, Gurule had strapped the magazines to his arms and the cardboard to his torso for protection against the razor-sharp wire that topped two 3-metre chain-link fences he scaled in his dramatic escape on Thanksgiving night. He ran to freedom under a hail of bullets from guards in towers 60 metres away. The autopsy, performed by the Harris County Medical Examiner Joy Carter in Houston, found Gurule suffered a "superficial" gunshot wound to the back that would not have killed him. Gurule, who was sentenced to die for killing two men during a robbery, was the first prisoner to escape from Texas' death row since January 1934 when the Bonnie and Clyde gang freed gang member Raymond Hamilton in a blaze of machine gun bullets. Hamilton was eventually recaptured and executed in May 1935. Carter said Gurule had been dead seven days, meaning he died shortly after the escape. "We believe he ran from the prison and went straight to the river," said Texas Department of Criminal Justice spokesman Larry Todd. Six other death row inmates started out with Gurule when he cut his way out of a caged-in recreation area in the rural jail. But they surrendered when the guards began firing, as they approached the double fence surrounding the prison 120 kilometres north of Houston. After a massive manhunt in which 500 police officers used dogs and helicopters to search the woods around the jail, Gurule's body was found 1.6 kilometres away Thursday afternoon by two off-duty prison employees out fishing. Gurule, a former orderly at a state school for the mentally retarded, was on death row for the 1992 murder of two men while robbing a restaurant in the Texas city of Corpus Christi. He did not yet have an execution date.

Amnesty says Indonesia losing sight of human rights

SYDNEY (R) — Amnesty International said Saturday the Indonesian government was failing to live up to its pledges on human rights and democracy and was resorting to repressive measures used by former President Suharto's regime.

"The government response to recent demonstration and riots shows a striking similarity to the repressive methods employed by the former Suharto regime," the London-based human rights said in a report issued in Australia.

Amnesty said President B.J. Habibie had come to power in May 1998 with a high-profile agenda for political and human rights reform which had delivered early positive results.

These included the release of 130 political prisoners and the opening up of Indonesia and the province of East Timor, annexed by Indonesia in 1976, to the United Nations officials.

"Six months later, the Indonesian government appears to have lost sight of

its commitment to respect human rights and for greater transparency and political participation," it said.

"In particular, excessive and lethal force has been used against demonstrators and rioters and individuals are being threatened with criminal charges for their peaceful political activities," it said. Indonesia, facing an acute social, political and economic upheaval, Thursday said it would hold general elections in June 1998.

It also promised to speed up an investigation into Suharto's wealth, the focus of mounting student protest amid estimated the former president's family amassed a fortune of up to \$40 billion during his reign.

Friday, a senior government official said Suharto could be placed under house arrest during a probe into his wealth.

Amnesty said Indonesia should bring to justice those responsible for the deaths in May 1998 in Jakarta of four Trisakti University students,

which sparked riots that brought an end to the 32-year Suharto rule. At least 1,200 people died during the riots.

"In particular, excessive and lethal force has been used against demonstrators and rioters and individuals are being threatened with criminal charges for their peaceful political activities," it said. Indonesia, facing an acute social, political and economic upheaval, Thursday said it would hold general elections in June 1998.

It also promised to speed up an investigation into Suharto's wealth, the focus of mounting student protest amid estimated the former president's family amassed a fortune of up to \$40 billion during his reign.

Friday, a senior government official said Suharto could be placed under house arrest during a probe into his wealth.

Amnesty said Indonesia should bring to justice those responsible for the deaths in May 1998 in Jakarta of four Trisakti University students,

Shuttle crew ready to mate space station elements

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (R) — Crew members of the space shuttle Endeavour tested crucial equipment Saturday as they prepared to join the first two pieces of the \$60 billion International Space Station.

"We've been checking out all our tools," Commander Robert Cabana told Mission Control on a live broadcast to earth. "We're looking forward to pulling Unity out of the payload bay and attaching it to the ODS (Orbiter Docking System)."

The Endeavour crew has a Sunday appointment to connect the U.S.-built Unity module to the Russian-made space station compo-

nent, Zarya, or Daybreak, which is already in orbit.

The most critical piece of equipment is the shuttle's robot arm, which astronaut Nancy Currie will use to grab Zarya, a massive power plant, and manoeuvre it above the Unity module.

Zarya and Endeavour will be both speeding through space at eight kilometres per second as Currie works to bring them together.

Currie is to remove Unity from its berth aboard Endeavour about 2200 GMT and grapple Zarya Sunday.

Cameras showed sunrise over the North Atlantic after Cabana, a U.S. Marine Corps Colonel and Naval

Academy graduate and Mission Specialist Currie, an Army Lt. Colonel, sent down support messages for their academy football teams.

The annual Army-Navy football game between the service academies was to be played later Saturday in Philadelphia.

Endeavour was launched early Friday — within a 10-minute window necessitated by the flight path of Zarya, which was passing over Cape Canaveral at launch time.

The shuttle will work until Sunday to adjust its orbit and rendezvous with Zarya. The six-astronaut crew will mate the first two elements of the

International Space Station some 210 nautical miles above the Earth's surface.

Once it has a third component, the Russian command module with living quarters for astronauts, the station will become functional.

Cabana and his crew waited a year for this mission, delayed as the cash-strapped Russian space programme struggled to complete the command module now scheduled for launch next summer.

The station, with a life-expectancy of 10-15 years, will take more than five years to build and is the most expensive scientific undertaking ever. More than 40 shuttle flights and hundreds of hours of high-

risk space walks will be required.

Supporters and detractors alike agree the station will severely test the spirit of cooperation between the United States and the Russians, bitter cold war rivals that now lead the effort among 16 nations to build the station.

Since the United States abandoned its Apollo moon programme two decades ago, only the Russians have had the heavy boosters needed to launch the station's most massive elements.

Astronauts Jerry Ross and James Newman are slated to make three space walks to connect Zarya's power supply to Unity and to complete

connections so the two modules can be pressurised.

The space suits they will be wearing for the trips were pronounced satisfactory Saturday.

Upon completion, the space station will stretch 110 metres and have more pressurised living and working space than a Boeing 747 jumbo jet.

The station is to be an orbiting laboratory for scientific inquiry into everything from cell division to the existence of an anti-matter universe. One goal is research designed to return humans to space beyond Earth orbit, where no one has journeyed since the last Apollo moon mission in the early 1970s.

Chinese police detain human rights petitioners

BEIJING (R) — Chinese police have detained two dissidents who launched a petition over Beijing's recent arrests of leading pro-democracy activists, a human rights group said Saturday.

Public Security Bureau officers in northeastern Liaoning province took Wang Zechen and Wang Wenjiang from their homes simultaneously in Qishan city Friday night, according to the Hong Kong-based Information Centre of Human Rights and Democratic Movement to China.

The two Wangs, who are not related, Wednesday published a letter signed by 191 dissidents in China demanding the release of Xu Wenli and other key leaders of the China Democratic Party, a self-fashioned opposition to the ruling Communist Party. The Communist Party rejects challenges to its leadership, and Beijing has refused to register the party.

Xu has been in police custody since Monday on suspicion of harming national security.

Two other party leaders, Qin Yongmin and Wang Youcai, have been formally arrested on charges of inciting to overthrow the state and could face life in prison if convicted.

Additional Chinese protests against the detentions have included hunger strikes this week by two former Tiananmen Square student leaders and a separate relay-style fast around the country, with one starting as another ended.

Two more dissidents in eastern Zhejiang province began 24-hour fasts this weekend, the rights group said.

Another activist in central Sichuan province announced he would assume oversight of the "Human Rights Observer," an influential rights maga-

zine that was edited by Qin Yongmin before his arrest, the group said.

A Beijing pro-democracy campaigner, Xu Liangying, also issued a public letter to Chinese President Jiang Zemin, Premier Zhu Rongji and justice officials demanding the immediate release of the original detainees, according to the New York-based Human Rights in China.

Beijing's action against Xu, Qin and Wang Youcai — who could end up in prison — marked a departure from a perceived softening in its approach to dissent over the past year.

Western diplomats and activists said. Since the release from prison and expulsion of two top dissidents beginning last November, and two presidential summits between China and the United States, police have generally played cat-and-mouse with dissidents, setting them free after short detentions and lectures.

Nevertheless, Western diplomats said they had not seen any sign of a general crackdown on the party so far.

Rather, they said the round-up was meant to target a handful of members instrumental to the coordination of the loose patchwork of party cells, and to warn other organisers.

"This is clearly a sign of Beijing's exasperation," said one Western diplomat. "They may take two or three of them and give them long sentences and hope that will scare everyone else into behaving themselves," the diplomat said.

A member of the Chinese Democratic Party's branch in Shandong province said Beijing's tactic would fail. "Who are they going to scare? Our activities are protected by the law. We have done nothing illegal," he said.



Cheung Tze-Keung, a top organised crime leader known as 'Big Spender' in Hong Kong, is taken before a court in Guangzhou shortly before being executed (Reuters photo)

'China serious on crime'

HONG KONG (R) — China's prompt execution of a top organised crime leader and his henchmen Saturday clearly showed Beijing would get tough on syndicates in Hong Kong and Macau, political analysts said.

Cheung Tze-Keung, known as "Big Spender," and four of his gang members were executed for a range of crimes, including kidnapping two prominent Hong Kong tycoons and trading of explosives, shortly after the People's High Court in Guangzhou rejected their appeals.

The court's decision and the prompt executions came as little surprise to the former British territory, which returned to Chinese rule in July 1997.

Political analyst and sociology professor Lau Siu-Kai at the Chinese University in Hong Kong said China's tough stance was meant as a deterrent for organised criminals.

"It was totally within expectations. By handling this case, the mainland wants to show that it treats very seriously organised crime in Hong Kong and Macau," Lau said. Hong Kong's government has repeatedly defended its lack of action in seeking Cheung's return, saying he was being tried for crimes committed on the mainland.

It also said it did not have sufficient evidence to prosecute Cheung in Hong Kong for the kidnappings in 1996 and 1997, which were never reported to police.

After the executions, the government said: "As these people were tried and convicted in the mainland for offences committed there under the mainland's criminal law, the mainland's law regarding penalties for criminal offences apply."

"We respect the independence of the judicial systems of other jurisdictions," it said in a statement.

Beijing has long expressed worries about rising crime, particularly in Portuguese administered Macau, which will revert to Chinese rule in December 1999. Top Beijing officials have in recent months pledged to help Macau rein in crime.

The case has fired controversy in Hong Kong where critics say Cheung should have been returned to face trial as the kidnappings took place here. Pro-democracy politicians and newspapers have also said they feared for the independence of the territory's judiciary if Cheung was not returned.

Cheung's lawyers argued he could receive a fair trial only in Hong Kong, which observes British civil law despite its return to Chinese rule last year. There is no death penalty in Hong Kong.

However, the case has nudged Hong Kong authorities to quickly hammer out an agreement with mainland China for the return of people accused of crimes in Hong Kong.

Zimbabwe, Angola attack north Congo

GOMA, Congo (R) — Angola and Zimbabwe have launched a counter-offensive against a rebel faction fighting in the northwest of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the faction's leader said Saturday.

Jean-Pierre Bemba, leader of the Congo Liberation Movement (CLM), said the offensive had begun Friday when Angolan and Zimbabwean troops started moving east from Lisala on the Congo River, 1,000 kilometres northeast of the capital Kinshasa.

It was the first report of fighting in the northwest involving Angola and Zimbabwe, powers that intervened in August together with Namibia to support President Laurent Kabila.

"There is now heavy combat. They are using heavy artillery, mortars and cannons," said Bemba, speaking by satellite telephone from Mindembo, around 60 kilometres east of Lisala.

"They (the government army) have reinforcement from Angola and Zimbabwe and they started to attack us Friday morning," he said, adding that the fighting had continued through the night.

There was no independent confirmation of the fighting.

Angolan forces entered the war decisively in late August in southwest Congo, halting a rebel advance on Kinshasa, while in the southeast Zimbabwean soldiers are battling the main rebel Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD) near Lake Tanganyika.

RCD military leader Jean-Pierre Ondekane told Reuters from that Ugandan capital Kampala the 80 government soldiers had been killed in fighting Thursday and Friday between Pepa and Moba, both around 1,600 kilometres southeast of Kinshasa. But he said he was unaware of the reported counter-offensive.

Rebels had said Friday that another offensive Thursday by Zimbabwean troops and aircraft on the strategic southeastern town of Kabalo had been repulsed.

Bemba, a Congolese businessman given military training by Uganda, says the CLM is fighting Kabila separately from the RCD, which took up arms on August 2 and is backed by Uganda and Rwanda.

Bemba said that senior Ugandan military officials had flown to northwest Congo from Kisangani

Friday for talks with his CLM.

Bemba gained prominence when his troops captured the town of Bumba, 100 kilometres east of Lisala, on Nov. 19. Since then CLM fighters have been advancing west along the north bank of the Congo River, apparently meeting little resistance.

Bemba said the Angolan and Zimbabwean troops had flown to Gbadolite, site of late Mobutu Sese Seko's palace, and driven down to Lisala. He cited intelligence reports from spies who he said had infiltrated to Lisala.

The second rebellion in under two years has cut Africa's third largest country almost in half and sent ripples throughout the continent.

Ondekane said senior rebel leaders were due to meet Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni later Saturday for a briefing on a deal on a possible ceasefire.

An agreement between Kabila, his foreign backers and Uganda and Rwanda was announced by U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan and French President Jacques Chirac in Paris last weekend, but the warring parties have since been non-committal about the deal.

U.S. court convicts fugitive Haitian of drug smuggling

MIAMI (R) — A top police official and reputed death squad leader under Haiti's former military regime was convicted in absentia by a federal court Friday of cocaine smuggling and money laundering.

Joseph Michel Francois is a fugitive from justice, having fought off U.S. attempts to extradite him from Honduras, where he settled after the toppling of the Haitian regime in 1994.

He was one of nine people convicted in the case in the U.S. District Court, three others of whom are also fugitives.

A U.S. immigration officer who allowed traffickers to pass through secure areas of Miami airport was one of those convicted. He is in custody.

U.S. drug fighters accused Francois of using his position as Port-au-Prince's police chief to set up an apparatus that flooded the United States with more than 33 tonnes of Colombian cocaine between 1987 and 1994, using Haiti as a transit point.

convicted of conspiracy to import cocaine from Colombia and Curacao in the Netherlands Antilles.

The five men convicted and in custody included Fernando Burgos-Martinez, 57, the Colombian cartel's liaison with corrupt Haitian officials, Marc Valme, 44, a Haitian military official who worked with the traffickers at Port-au-Prince airport, and Joel Audain, 39, a U.S. Immigration and Naturalisation officer at Miami airport.

One defendant, Fritz Lafontaine, 44, fled during the trial.

They face a maximum of life imprisonment with a minimum of 10 years in jail, and a fine of \$4 million. Judge Federico Moreno set sentencing for Feb. 12.

Francois is believed to have been the mastermind behind the 1991 military coup that toppled Haiti's elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. During his tenure as police chief he ran a security apparatus that viciously repressed any opposition.

He fled to the Dominican Republic in 1994 after U.S. troops invaded the country to restore Aristide to power. He left for Honduras in 1996 after Dominican authorities arrested him on charges of plotting to overthrow the Haitian government again.

He has proclaimed his innocence over drug smuggling in news conferences in Honduras.

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Netanyahu's hypocrisy

IT IS simply shameful that Israel would mention the mob attack on an Israeli soldier who escaped uninjured, but say nothing of the stabbing death of a Palestinian worker in Jerusalem. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu seized, or rather exploited, a TV footage of the attack on an Israeli car a few days ago to declare the suspension of the implementation of the Wye River agreement, but found no reason to remember the killing of an innocent Palestinian man in Jerusalem, the city he wants to be a symbol for peace and love, forever united under the Israeli flag.

The obvious Netanyahu hypocrisy in this matter is a grim reminder that for him, the life of another Palestinian is not worth the simplest of wounds inflicted on an Israeli. All indicators point to the inevitable conclusion that Netanyahu has his eyes on the domestic political scene and the threat of calling for another general election supported not only by the opposition but also by some hardliners within his own ranks.

Any excuse to bring back to the fold ultra-religious factions and extremists would serve Netanyahu's political agenda, which is to stay in power for four more years. His infamous three new conditions for the full implementation of the recently brokered Wye accord seem to be only a ploy to rewrite the deal altogether. This is almost an identical tactic used to pilage the Oslo accords, the rewriting of which can only be called "Oslo la Netanyahu."

It is good that Washington has rejected these new conditions as ultra vires to the Wye memorandum. Now it is up to the U.S. to knock some sense into Netanyahu as it did on so many occasions in the past.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

AI Ra'i's Fahed Faneek said if the Jordanian government wants to go ahead with its agricultural plans in Sudan, it has to carefully study past similar Arab experiences in the area first, because the Kingdom does not have extra capital, extra agricultural human resources, extensive experience nor has it succeeded in fully exploiting its own agricultural capabilities. Jordan is not the only party that is trying to plough and plant Sudan, the writer said, the Arab Agricultural Development Organisation and the Arab Gulf states have lost billions of dollars in the area which lacks the basic elements of production. When the former Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali returned from Sudan with a "generous" offer to put 250,000 dunum under the agriculture ministry's direction, the issue was an "exchange of compliments." But now it seems the government is serious about the project and holds meetings with local investors who won't agree unless the first party guarantees profits and bears losses, argued Faneek.

AI Dostour's editorial said that at a time all Middle East parties are calling for peace and are activating the peace process to avoid more military confrontations, Israel keeps working against these moves. It threatens to create problems between Syria and Lebanon, destroys the Lebanese infrastructure and harms the Wye River accord by applying tough conditions on the Palestinian side or through provocative practices by the army or settlers. This policy is designed to avoid the implementation of the deal on the Palestinian front, while at the same time overwhelming the "new Lebanese era" with security problems, said the editorial. This can be seen through the continuous bombing of Lebanon at a very sensitive time in which Israel faces a lot of internal problems, claimed the editorial which added that the international powers must apply pressure on Israel to stop this aggravation.

Foreign investors must be welcome

IN RECENT years, Jordanians have started to complain bitterly about the low economic growth, the high rate of unemployment, and the spread of poverty, all resulting from lower level of economic activities, accompanied by declining prices in the financial market (shares), and dwindling demand on real estate (land and apartments). The question most asked is: How long will this state of affairs continue, and how can Jordan emerge from this turmoil and resume growth and prosperity?

Countries that advanced socially, prospered economically, grew at a fast rate, and was successful in raising the standard of living and improving quality of life, did not depend solely on their own limited domestic savings and were not satisfied with their own hesitant local investors. Such countries, without exception opened up their borders to direct and indirect investments from every-

where. During the last fifty years, Jordan has issued a chain of laws to encourage investments and lure Arab and foreign investors to participate in the economic effort and contribute towards building a sound productive sector, able to create more jobs and raise incomes. For some reason or another, Jordan did not succeed in attracting substantial foreign investments. Analysts differ on the explanation for this failure which have resulted in the current economic slowdown and the unemployment, poverty, and backwardness that go with it.

We venture to suggest two reasons behind the failure. The first reason is the marginalisation of the private sector for too long a time; it was brought up to live on government largesse and depend on its protection. The second reason is the unjustified resistance to foreign investors under the false impression that

foreign investors are monsters aiming to subject the country to their hegemony and siphoning off its wealth abroad.

It is strange to find politicians, writers and other activists issuing slogans and writing columns warning against external investors, simply because they are foreign. Jordan is known to be very friendly to foreigners, maybe the only place in the Middle East where foreigners feel safe and go about their business at ease. Misleading Jordanian citizens about foreigners for political gain is hurting the economy and should be stopped.

We should have confidence in ourselves and trust our ability as a sovereign independent state to deal with any violation, ill intention or attempt to hurt the economy, whether begot by a foreigner or a national. Foreign investors, and strategic partners have no militia or strike force; they come to make money with-

Sunday's Economic Pulse



Dr. Fahed Faneek

in the existing laws and regulations. Needless to say, foreign investors tend to respect the law of the land more than national investors, who repeatedly try to gain extra advantages by bypassing laws and pending regulations.

When it comes to economic

behaviour, there is no difference between a foreigner and a national. Both seek their own interests, and are ready to flee if the climate becomes cloudy. As a matter of fact, the billions of dollars of capital flight abroad belong to Jordanians who couldn't care less about public interest if they felt that their capital was at risk.

Foreign investors come for pure financial objectives. In our modern history, there is not one episode of a foreign investor who has tried to hurt the Jordanian economy. Investments in Jordan are Jordanian, irrespective of the nationality of the investor. Every foreigner who puts capital in Jordan has faith in Jordan and deserves to be trusted in turn.

Scaring people away from foreign investors and strategic partners is a result of sheer ignorance, fanaticism, and self-interest.

Quebec: The 'neverendum referendum'

By Gwynne Dyer

CANADA ISN'T out of the woods yet, but Quebec's provincial election on November 30 suggests that it is getting close to the edge. After three decades of continuous low-level crisis, periodically surging to acute levels as the mainly French-speaking province elects another separatist government or holds another referendum on independence, the whole story is going stale.

After the last referendum narrowly failed in 1995, Lucien Bouchard, the new leader of the separatist Parti Quebecois (PQ), was defiantly optimistic. "The objective of the PQ remains sovereignty, which Quebec has never been so close to achieving," he said. "Once (the rest of Canada) has drained the last dregs of its incapacity to recognise our reality as a people, another referendum opening will occur, under winning conditions for Quebec." Well, not exactly. Over 80 per cent of Quebec's 7 million people are so-called "old stock" French-Canadians, mostly descended from the original settlers from Normandy and Brittany. If they could all agree that they wanted independence, it would happen overnight, even though the so-called "anglophone" and "allophone" (recent immigrant) minorities are solidly against it. But they can never quite get their collective nerve up to try.

It's so hard to persuade French-speaking Quebecois to risk leaving Canada that in four of the six provincial elections since the 'Quebec crisis' erupted in the late 60s, the PQ has had to say that it was only running for office. The question of independence would be settled separately, it promised, in a referendum. So four times Quebecers have elected the PQ and twice they have said 'no' to independence in referendums.

True, the PQ has won the provincial election again, and Premier Lucien Bouchard is still promising another referendum as soon as he has "winning conditions." But he has already backed away from his prediction that Quebec would enter the next millennium as a sovereign nation, and now will not even promise that the referendum will happen during the next

four years.

The PQ actually won this election on a slightly smaller share of the vote than the Liberal opposition (whose anti-separatist supporters are heavily concentrated in the metropolis of Montreal).

But in a referendum every vote counts, so the target of '50-per cent-plus-one' that separatists say would give them a mandate for independence continues to recede like a desert mirage.

It may recede forever. Quebec governments almost never win a third term, so the PQ has probably won power for the last time before demographic changes make any future winning referendum impossible. Because slowly but inexorably, the ethnic character of Quebec's French-speaking population is diversifying.

It began with the 'Quiet Revolution' of the 1960s, which overthrew the Catholic Church as Quebec's dominant institution. The fall of the old elites led to rapid democratisation — but also, as usual in these cases, to an upsurge of nationalism.

All the excitement of the past thirty years in Quebec, from the bombs and kidnappings of the late 60s to the 'neverendum referendum' of recent years, are inevitable consequences of that outburst of nationalism. There is practically nothing that the English-speaking parts of Canada could have done except to ride it out and hope for the best.

But it is the nationalism of a specific generation — and demographic change is now happening quite fast. For the other consequence of the 'Quiet Revolution' was one of the steepest falls in the birth-rate that the world has ever seen. In one generation, Quebec dropped to an average family size of only 1.3 children: one of the lowest birth-rates in the world.

So if the French language was not to die out in North America, it needed lots of new recruits. Almost overnight, Quebec went from a policy that aimed at ethnic purity (leaving the immigrants to join the English-speaking minority) to a policy of forcing almost all immigrants to send their children to school in French.

It was vital to preserve French-speakers' share in the Canadian population (around 24 per cent of 30 million people), but it was also a political Trojan horse. For all these new-generation French-speakers of Uruguayan or Iranian or Tamil or Vietnamese origin, though they will continue to defend the position of French in Canada, do not share the historical myths and obsessions of the 'old stock' voters who are tempted by the separatist project.

With every election, these 'allophone' voters (non-traditional French-speakers) are a larger share of the electorate. And with every passing year, the need to include them in the discussion shifts the parameters of political discourse in Quebec a little further to the disadvantage of the separatists. When the mythology isn't shared, the buttons are harder to press.

The damage done to Quebec by thirty years of political uncertainty has been huge, and it's not over yet. Montreal used to be the big city in Canada, a status that, once gained, cities almost never lose. (After 200 years of westward expansion, New York is still America's biggest city.) And at that time, just 30 years ago, houses in Montreal cost one-third more than in Toronto.

Now Toronto has a million more people, and houses in Toronto cost, on average, three times what they do in Montreal. The whole country has taken the hit. And while currencies fluctuate for various reasons, it's striking that 30 years ago the Canadian dollar was worth more than the U.S. dollar. Now it's worth barely two-thirds of it: the whole country has taken the hit. It has been a long, grim decline for Quebec, and to a lesser extent for the rest of the country too. There will be at least four or five more years of it, for Premier Bouchard will keep Quebec on the edge of a referendum, psychologically speaking, even if he never dares to call it. But Canada is probably a lot closer to the end of the ordeal than to the beginning.

The writer is an independent London-based journalist whose articles are published in 45 countries.

The partition of Palestine and its consequences

By Pascal B. Karmy

ON NOV. 29, 1978, the United Nations General Assembly decided that that day shall be consecrated as the day of solidarity with the Palestinian people. It was also on this day in 1947 that the United Nations General Assembly passed Resolution 181 (II) partitioning Palestine into two states: One Arab and the other Jewish.

The Palestinians and the Arabs with them rejected the partition of Palestine whose Arab inhabitants constituted two-thirds of Palestine and the Jews one third. And the Jews owned less than 7 per cent of the whole land of Palestine according to Palestine government statistics.

The partition resolution was passed by 33 votes against 13. It is common knowledge now that many of the states which had voted for the partition did so under duress or heavy pressure from President Truman himself. The latter even bypassed the State Department and issued instructions directly to the United States delegation during the debate on the Palestine question at the General Assembly. President Truman himself was under unprecedented pressure from the Zionists and the Jews in the United States as his memoirs show.

In his memoirs he recorded the following: "The facts were that not only pressure movements around the United Nations, unlike anything that had been seen before, but that the White House too was subjected to a constant barrage. I do not think that I had ever had as

much pressure and propaganda aimed at the White House as I had in this instance. Some of the extreme Zionist leaders were even suggesting that we pressure sovereign nations into favourable votes in the General Assembly."

An important witness of this inordinate pressure on the General Assembly members is recorded by James Forrestal, then U.S. secretary for defence. In his diaries he stated the following: "There was a feeling among the Jews that the United States was not doing what it should to solicit votes in the United Nations General Assembly in favour of Palestine partition. I thought it was the most disastrous and regrettable fact that the foreign policy of this country was determined by the contribution a particular bloc of special interests might make to party funds. I thought that the methods that had been used by people outside of the executive branch of the government to bring coercion and duress on other nations in the General Assembly bordered closely on scandal... Our Palestine policy had been made by squalid political purposes."

Stephen Penrose, then President of the American University of Beirut, criticised the American pressure in favour of partition as follows: "The political manoeuvring which led to the final acceptance of the U.N. General Assembly of the partition provides one of the blackest pages in the history of the American international politics. There can be no question that it was American pressure which brought about the acceptance of the recommendation for

partition of Palestine by the General Assembly on Nov. 29, 1947.

All the above shows clearly that the members of the General Assembly of the United Nations were in fact unwilling to partition Palestine which existed as one unitary state. As a consequence of this partition, the British mandate over Palestine ended in a tragedy (called "Nakba" by the Arabs) which hardly has any parallel in modern history and our region is still suffering from its calamitous effects. With regard to the legality of partition several international jurists and law authorities questioned and even impugned the legality of the partition resolution. But dealing with this legal problem requires more extensive study than the present pages can contain.

From the partition has ensued conflicts in the Middle East since 1947 which have not been resolved according to international legitimacy and justice. I remember the late well-known Lebanese writer Michel Chiha writing in the Lebanese French newspaper "Le Jour" several articles in which he warned the Western powers against the partition of Palestine on the ground that it would cause untold misery to the people concerned and that it will sow the seeds of conflict and turmoil in the Middle East. Michel Chiha's foresight proved to be correct. The bloody conflict is still persisting.

Indeed the Oslo Accords have not achieved real peace between the Jews and the Palestinians. Clashes occur almost every day

between Arabs and Jews whether in Palestine itself or in south Lebanon. Israel is still bent on confiscation of Palestinian lands, destroying their houses leaving them homeless and despairing and detaining them without trial for years. There can be no real peace in the Middle East unless Israel recognises the full rights of Palestinians including the right to self-determination and consequent declaration of the Palestine state and the end of Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights and south Lebanon. Israel cannot be predominant in the Middle East and it should reject its arrogance and haughtiness vis-a-vis the Palestinians and the Arabs. And as the historian Paul Kennedy states in his book "The rise and fall of the great powers": "It has not been given to any one society to remain permanently ahead of all others. Israel should therefore come to terms with its neighbouring states and the Palestinians and relinquish the usurped and occupied territories by genuine peace agreements within the framework of Security Council Resolutions 242, 338 and 425." Will the state of Israel respond to sound and reasonable voices of historians and writers such as Paul Kennedy and reconcile itself with the Arab peoples?

The writer was an advocate in Palestine in 1944 and for many years, legal officer at UNRWA headquarters in Beirut and Vienna.

LETTERS Religious tolerance

The editor:

YOUR EDITORIAL "Seeds for tolerance and harmony" (JL Dec. 3) supporting the agreement recently reached between the Ministry of Education and the Council of Christian Bishops reflects many laudable sentiments and views. However, while obviously positive and well meaning, it falls unfortunately into a number of common errors that require a friendly gentle comment.

First of all, it speaks of the role of Christians as a precious link with the Western world, "with which they share their religion." The facts are, that while Jordanian Christians who are linked to the West have certainly played their patriotic role with effectiveness and integrity, their services had nothing to do with any commonality of religion with the West. In fact, it is patently false to think of the West as having any religious identity, or being in any way "Christian." The most that can be said of Western society is that it is "post-Christian" having effectively outgrown the period of religious identification with society, having achieved after centuries of struggle, the separation of Church and State, and having relegated religion to its proper and respected position as a matter of conscience left to each individual, whose exercise is protected, but not interfered with by society at large.

More troublesome, however, is the reference to Jordanian Christians as "a minority" being magnanimously granted "their internationally-recognised rights." Jordanian Christians refuse to be considered a "minority" in any sense of the word. They are an integral authentic, organic part of this society, who would be lost without it; and which would be fundamentally impoverished without them. The issue is not whether Jordan is a society that "tolerates minorities," but whether it is a mature society all of whose citizens, Muslim, or Christian, are free from religious coercion and able to exercise their beliefs under the protection, but without the intrusion, of the state.

In this vein, it is commendable that Jordan is willing to teach Christianity to Christians in its public schools. It would also be educationally beneficial to teach Christianity (and other religions) to all its students, in an open, tolerant and non-coercive fashion.

Jonathan Kuttab
 Amman

Words of advice

To the editor:

I AM a Filipino national who came to Jordan a few years ago to work as a domestic helper. I left my country to learn something new and earn a decent living. The agency I worked with, however, made my life a misery, and my employers regularly hit me with their dirty clothes and scared me so much that I had nightmares. But I persevered and kept up with my workload. I was too frightened to complain.

I want to say that we domestic helpers are human beings with self-respect, who are not stupid, and we have rights. To any new domestic helpers, never be afraid of standing up for your rights, if you are being abused by your employers. Also, I would like to say thank you to the ambassador of the Philippines, Mr. Rupert M. Dizon, who has never hesitated in helping us in moments of distress.

Mary Rose Torres
 Amman

feature
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By Diane Coyle

Last a pai
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By Dan Glaister

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Is capitalism heading for breakdown?

By Diane Coyle

"AS A FUND manager, I depended a great deal on my emotions. The predominant feelings I operated with were doubt, uncertainty and fear," writes George Soros in his new book, *The Crisis of Global Capitalism*. Wrecking ball, bubonic plague, depression, total breakdown — these are just a few of the emotional phrases Soros uses in his analysis of global financial markets. When someone who has benefited to the tune of billions of dollars from the financial markets says that destabilising speculation threatens a complete breakdown of the capitalist system — which has delivered such amazing advances in prosperity over the past five decades — it is worth paying attention.

Certainly, opponents of free market economics have hailed Mr. Soros' recantation with glee. But is there any analytical substance behind the emotional gloss of the Soros critique? Financial markets have always been prone to crises.

Human nature seems to contain a herd instinct, and besides, it can be rational for investors to create a bubble so long as they are confident about getting out before it bursts. There is nothing inherently damaging about such self-fulfilling speculation. Indeed, in his *Tract on Monetary Reform*, John Maynard Keynes — usually quoted for his condemnation of "casino capitalism" — emphasises the importance of speculators to healthy capital markets. Speculators provide liquidity and reinforce existing trends rather than bucking them, he argued.

The speculation has to have something to feed on in the first place. Even so, the financial markets have clearly been a destabilising force in the world economy since the Asian crisis first erupted in July 1997. It raises the question of whether, as

capital flows have grown larger and more footloose, the speculative froth has reached unacceptable proportions. In particular, would it be sensible to reintroduce capital controls, which have been steadily dismantled over the past three decades? Although some economists — notably Paul Krugman of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology — think there is a good case for capital controls, Soros is clearly against them. "Capital controls are an invitation for evasion, corruption and the abuse of power," he writes.

Certainly, the first regime to reach for controls, post-crisis, was the authoritarian Malaysian government. Meanwhile Chile, which did have restrictions on capital inflows, has recently lifted them. Exchange controls were effective after the war, when so much economic activity was subject to planning and restriction, but by the early 1970s they were all but useless. So, while one lesson of the Asian crisis is that developing countries should liberalise slowly and cautiously, it must not be forgotten that there were good reasons for the abolition of capital controls in the first place. But if this type of restriction is not the answer, what can be done? Soros concludes that there should be international financial regulation, but not by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The IMF is part of the problem, he says. Rather, he puts the onus on the Group of Seven countries, but concludes that the prospects of the G7 taking effective action are dim as it has not yet intervened in Russia. However, it is difficult to see the G7 as the right vehicle for international financial management, important as it might be in the case of a large and politically important country such as Russia. Apart from anything else the G7 itself is in flux, with the introduction of the euro in January likely to see the rapid emergence of a G5.

In addition, the biggest countries cannot practically be involved in overseeing all of the rest of the world, which is why the IMF and other such bodies exist. In the end, it

'Wrecking ball, bubonic plague, depression, total breakdown — these are just some of the phrases Soros uses in his analysis of global financial markets'

is not the institutional arrangements that matter. If the IMF did not exist, there would be calls for its creation after this year's crisis. The two key problems are whether the response to financial market turbulence should include genuine international co-ordination through the creation of a worldwide lender-of-last-resort, and what sort of exchange rate regime should exist.

As Soros knows, fixed exchange rates can easily become sitting ducks for speculators. They are sustainable only if the countries locking their currencies to another are prepared to adjust their domestic economic policies for the sake of the exchange rate. The gold standard

survived only as long as they were. But the U.K. in 1992 was not prepared to match its macroeconomic policy to Germany's, and the pound's exchange rate mechanism link was doomed. The only viable alternatives in a world of huge capital flows are freely floating exchange rates and currency union. Europe has opted for the latter. If the rest of the world is stuck with floating rates, how can governments hope to counter the instability of the financial markets? One solution is to have perfect domestic policies at all times, giving speculators nothing to run against.

But this is a touch utopian — even if they all had first-rate policy makers, economies are buffeted by all sorts of shocks. Another would be to create a genuine international authority with the task of stabilising the world economy and markets. At present the work of adjusting to crisis is forced on to a combination of the IMF and national central banks. The IMF, which has meagre resources, effectively bails out banks that face the risk of default by a borrower by providing liquidity to the borrower, while national central banks bail them out by providing liquidity to the lender within their own boundaries if there looks to be a serious threat to the domestic banking system. Perhaps the creation of an international lender of last resort would be preferable to this messy ad hoc response. Soros seems to think some such source of finance is needed to resolve the crisis in the markets he helped destabilise. So, too, do some G7 officials. But the proposal is controversial. Others believe that lending to borrowers in emerging markets is a risky business whose risk should fall directly on the speculators themselves — not least Soros Fund Management.

— The Independent



At last a painter wins the Turner Prize — with a little help from elephant dung

By Dan Glaister

THANKS TO a large helping of elephant dung, conceptual art's hold on the Turner Prize was broken last week when Chris Ofili became the first painter to win the £20,000 prize since 1985. But he is not the sort of painter who would necessarily appease the traditionalists who have made a habit of protesting against the Turner Prize's recent championing of conceptual art. His colourful works include dried, resin-coated elephant dung, glitter and cartoon characters as well as incorporating references to black culture and Renaissance painting. Some even glow in the dark.

Ofili was the only man and the only painter among the four shortlisted artists. The other artists included a film-maker, a sculptor and a photographer. The last painter to win the Turner Prize — named after one of Britain's greatest painters — was Howard Hodgkin in 1985. Ofili is the first black artist to win the prize.

Announcing the winner, the judges praised "the originality and energy of his painting, and his dynamic use of colour." They also admired "the complexity of his work, with its multilayered references to contemporary urban culture and awareness of the history of art." Ofili was the hot favourite with the book-makers to win this year's prize, with closing odds of 5-4. On his Turner Prize success came an astounding year for the young painter, following an acclaimed and highly popular show at the Southampton City Art Gallery which later toured to the Serpentine Gallery in London. It is currently at Manchester City Art

Gallery.

His paintings, which veer from the figurative to the abstract, often star a mythical black superhero called Captain Shit, inspired by the Marvel comics. Captain Shit is surrounded in many pictures by cut-outs of figures from black popular culture, from James Brown to Muhammad Ali. But his work is not exclusively about the black experience: pornography and the Bible also get mentions.

"My project is not a PC project," he has said. "It allows you to laugh about issues that are potentially serious. There are no rules, and even the ones you set for yourself can be temporary." Ofili is unafraid to incorporate contemporary politics into his work. One painting in the Turner Prize exhibition, *No Woman No Cry*, is a tribute to the dignity and suffering of Doreen Lawrence, the mother of the murdered teenager Stephen Lawrence. It features teardrops descending from a woman's face. Each tear contains a tiny black and white portrait of Stephen Lawrence.

Although his work incorporates many elements of popular culture, he insists that it is anything but frivolous. "My work comes out of a way that I work comes out of experimentation, but it also comes out of a love of painting, a love affair with painting." The elephant dung, which he acquires free of charge from London Zoo, was inspired by a visit to Zimbabwe. He both stands his paintings on the dung and sticks it to the canvas.

The other artists on the shortlist were Tacita Dean, Cathy de Monchaux and Sam Taylor-Wood.

— The Guardian

One night's journey toward death

Silent Day in Tangier
By Taher Ben Jelloun
London, Quartet Books,
1991, 109 pages, JD17.500

STORIES WITH little plot are often considered weak and inadequate. "Silent Day in Tangier" is one exception to that rule. In Ben Jelloun's novel nothing changes and nothing new takes place. Yet, he manages to create from nothing a most intriguing story.

The novel takes place over one night in one room, and the entire events are mere recollections in an old man's mind. Sick and bored, the old man can only summon dead friends and enemies, and reminisce over his past affairs and adventures. Yet, despite roving a lifetime in his memory, he remains static, under one roof, going nowhere. We get a seemingly intimate and personal account of one man's life, but this specificity is remarkably compromised as he remains unnamed — he could be anyone and everyone.

We see a typical stubborn old man, too proud to confess to even his age. As he remembers all his dead friends it becomes clear that "One of the sources of his pride is this fidelity to the past. It is also a source of regret, because he knows that he is in the process of becoming the last witness of an era" p. 49. He is intelligent yet clearly submerged in senility — although the events take place over one night, we sense a gradual deterioration in his state of mind, talking to himself, or doubting the validity of his memories.

A sharp-witted man with a rare talent with words, a talent which has become impaired by age, he uses it only to pick on his wife, maid, and especially the objects surrounding him. His detest for objects also reveals another reason for his unwillingness to confess to his age: it derives from the fact that objects are immortal, though they age just like him, their stubborn existence disturbs him because they will be there after he dies "utterly indifferent to their uselessness" p. 51. Simultaneously, he refuses to admit that these objects have lost value or become dysfunctional, because he is afraid it would lead him to admit that he's gradually losing his own value. He ignores the cracks in the ceiling

'Old age, according to Jelloun, is a mistake, a misunderstanding between the body and the mind'

and the rotten window frames just as he ignores his failing eyesight and hearing.

The old man's way with words is a vehicle for Ben Jelloun to display his own aptitude. Ben Jelloun is just as fascinated with language as his character "because it allows him to play acrobatic stunts with his intelligence" p. 62. He has a unique ability to twist words, to give them a new

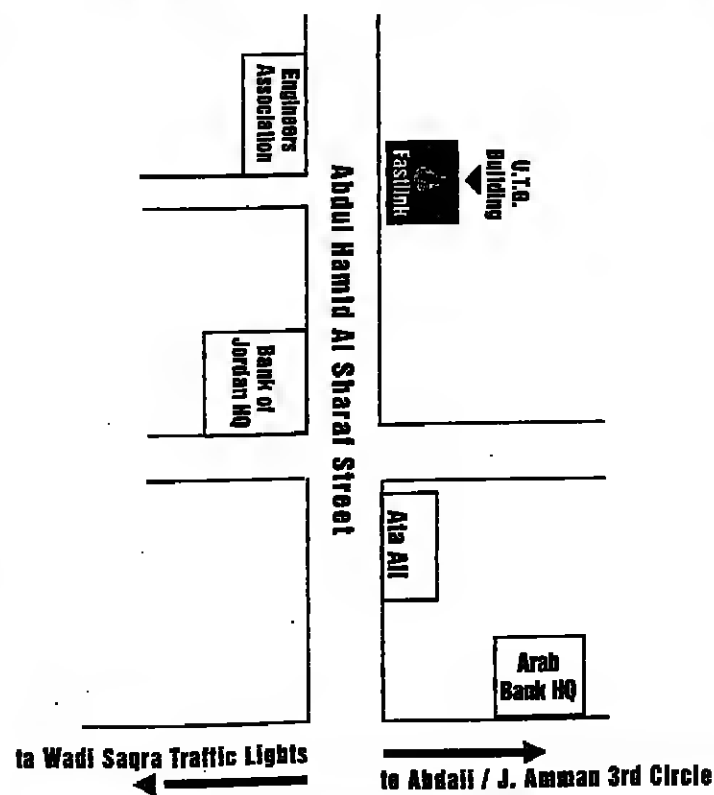
dimension. Thus old age is "an error, a misunderstanding between the body and the mind, between the body and time" p. 29. As the old man feels slowly drawn into the abyss by the voices of his dead friends, he comes to the conclusion that death is "familiar voices reaching our ears from beneath the earth, but distorted beyond recognition" p. 49.

This story leaves a composite of contradicting impressions. It is filled with beautiful images and sketched with remarkable prose, but it leaves a sour taste! The outcome is grim and claustrophobic; maybe a sincere account of what it would be like to have one foot in the grave.

— Dima Hamdan



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JCFC, Lafarge pledge 'no arbitrary lay-offs' in meeting with PM

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Jordan Cement Factories Company and strategic partner Lafarge yesterday offered assurances that cement factory workers will not be laid off arbitrarily as they try to pare down the factory's operations, said JCFC Chairman Hamdi Tabbaa.

According to Tabbaa, JCFC and Lafarge told Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh that none of the workers and employees at the cement factory will be laid off, in accordance with the memoranda of understanding the two sides concluded earlier.

Lafarge Vice Chairman and Chief Operations Officer Jacques Lefevre was quoted as making the pledge during a meeting with Tarawneh, with whom he reviewed Lafarge's plans to employ modern technology to improve the product's quality, reduce production costs and help protect the environment.

Lafarge, the French cement giant, last month became JCFC's new strate-

gic partner with the purchase of a 33.3 per cent stake in JCFC.

It is hoped that Lafarge will help Jordan produce cement at competitive prices and open new markets for the product abroad. It is also expected to provide better technology to the company.

Lafarge purchased 20 million shares at JD3.6, twice the closing price of JD1.8 in mid-October when the trade ban on cement shares was imposed at the Amman Financial Market ahead of the JCFC sale.

The government said last month that it was selling the workers 1.2 million of its shares to employees at JD 1.5 per share, payable in instalments over a 12-month period.

Tabbaa said the government and JCFC-Lafarge consider the cement factory's privatisation as one of the most successful privatisation processes to date in the government's privatisation drive, adding that Lafarge does not enjoy

privileges at the expense of the JCFC.

Critics of the deal fear that Lafarge, or other foreign companies, could gain an inroad into Jordan's key mining sector as the single largest shareholder in the company.

Under the deal, Lafarge cannot sell its shares for ten years, unless it fails to win a seat on the board of directors. In the event of a sale, Jordanian investors will have first dibs on the blue chip stock.

Lefevre said Lafarge chose JCFC to acquire equity in view of the fact that Jordan enjoys political stability and has introduced legislation that encourages foreign investments.

Tabbaa said that Lafarge aims to market Jordanian cement in Europe, possibly by next year.

French Ambassador Bernard Emie who attended the meeting expressed hope that Lafarge's contributions will have positive impact on Jordanian-French economic relations.

OPEC boss predicts extraordinary meeting to combat falling prices

MUSCAT (R) — OPEC's secretary-general said on Saturday the oil cartel would not rule out holding an extraordinary meeting to deal with the world oil price crisis before its next scheduled session in March.

"If things should warrant another meeting before March, I am sure (OPEC) member countries would institute such a meeting," Rikman Lukman told reporters in Muscat.

Lukman was speaking at a news conference on the sidelines of international economic forum in Oman, a small, independent oil producer which remained outside the OPEC but cooperates with its decisions.

Oil members of the 11-member OPEC failed in their regular winter meeting in Vienna last month to take any action to rescue oil markets depressed by lowest prices since 1976.

Previously agreed oil production cuts totalling 2.6 million barrels per day (bpd) — some 10 per cent of OPEC output, remain in place until June, although independent monitors say several countries desperate for cash have been cheating on their quotas.

Iran and Venezuela have been signalled out as prime production quota busters.

The Vienna meeting was marred by bitter squabbling over compliance with two rounds of oil production cuts agreed earlier this year aimed at bolstering prices.

Lukman said OPEC, which is dominated by the world's largest producer and exporter Saudi Arabia, has limited power to impose strong output discipline on member countries because they are sovereign states.

"We don't have the power of sanctions... You cannot embargo a country for violating its quota," he said.

At the inconclusive Vienna meeting, ministers agreed to meet

again in March as previously scheduled. Analysts said OPEC would need to cut another 1.5 million bpd then to lift prices about current levels of around \$10.

"Right now, the agreement in place is valid until June," Lukman said.

"So, we already have that in our pocket... The conference reserves the right to hold an extraordinary meeting."

The former Nigerian cabinet minister said there was too much oil in the market. But he added, "We can't go on cutting, cutting, cutting for ever."

Lukman reiterated OPEC price targets of \$15-\$20 per barrel.

"OPEC would be happy with a \$15-\$20 price range. That is the price we are working towards," he said.

Lukman sidestepped a question about the likelihood of a separate meeting between Saudi Arabia, Venezuela and Mexico — architects of this year's first round of production cuts.

"The so-called architects met early last week in Vienna. It is up to them if they want to meet so soon after that," he said, adding, "There are consultations going on all the time."

Lukman said the present environment of low oil prices and subdued demand had created uncertainties and sharpened the perception of investment risks for producers and investors.

"This has the disturbing potential of derailing what ordinarily would have been a timely investment to cater for projected high volume demand in the medium to long-term," he said.

"Unless investors begin to take actions soon, especially given the long-lead time for oil and gas expansion projects to come onstream, the seeds of drastic oil price volatility as a consequence of inadequate supply caused by under-investment, would have been sown."

Exchange Rates									
Saturday, 05-12-98									
CURRENCY	JORDAN DINAAR	SAUDI RIAL	U.A.E. DIRHAM	BAHRAIN DINAAR	OMAN RIAL	QATAR RIAL	YEMEN RIAL	LIBAN LIRA	SYRIAN LIRA
JORDAN DINAAR	1.0000	0.1887	0.1927	0.1878	0.1890	0.1844	0.2336	0.2077	0.7060
SAUDI RIAL	5.2867	1.0000	0.9501	0.9429	0.9429	1.0089	12.1254	1.0078	3.7594
U.A.E. DIRHAM	5.1853	0.9799	1.0000	0.9746	0.9746	1.0089	12.1254	1.0078	3.7594
BAHRAIN DINAAR	0.5325	0.1025	0.1025	1.0000	1.0000	0.1035	1.2443	0.1108	0.3770
OMAN RIAL	0.5438	0.1028	0.1048	1.0211	1.0000	0.1057	1.2706	0.1129	0.3863
QATAR RIAL	5.1434	0.9707	0.9912	9.5584	9.4584	1.0000	12.0182	1.0083	3.6415
YEMEN RIAL	4.4280	0.8808	0.8825	9.4036	9.4036	0.8832	1.0000	0.8889	0.3030
LIBAN LIRA	0.5325	0.1025	0.1025	9.4036	9.4036	0.8832	1.0000	0.8889	0.3030
SYRIAN LIRA	4.6145	0.8808	0.8825	9.4036	9.4036	0.8832	1.0000	0.8889	0.3030
LEBANON LIRA	21.4531	4.0544	4.1399	40.3416	39.5063	4.1759	50.1980	4.4621	15.2100
US DOLLAR	1.4124	0.2688	0.2722	2.6523	2.5974	0.2746	3.3003	0.2634	1.0000
GBRITAIN POUND	0.8482	0.1603	0.1637	1.5947	1.5517	0.1651	1.9843	0.1774	0.6013
GERMANY MARK	2.3551	0.4454	0.4556	4.4413	4.3494	0.4598	5.5264	0.4912	1.6745
FRANCE FRANC	1.9332	0.3648	0.3725	3.6302	3.5551	0.3759	4.5172	0.4015	1.3587
ITALY LIRA	11.3543	2.1351	2.1842	21.2540	20.8434	2.2037	26.4242	2.3443	8.0247
NETHERLAND GUILDER	1.6756	0.3153	0.3229	3.1470	3.0818	0.3258	3.9158	0.3481	1.1855
SPAIN POUND	1.6756	0.3153	0.3229	3.1470	3.0818	0.3258	3.9158	0.3481	1.1855
NETHERLAND GUILDER	2.0595	0.5038	0.5144	5.0125	4.9021	0.5190	6.2371	0.5545	1.8900
NETHERLAND GUILDER	11.3543	2.1351	2.1842	21.2540	20.8434	2.2037	26.4242	2.3443	8.0247
NETHERLAND GUILDER	23.4188	4.4188	4.5131	43.9785	43.0681	4.5534	54.7234	4.8544	16.5812
NETHERLAND GUILDER	48.8512	9.2270	9.4216	91.8057	89.8091	9.5057	114.2409	10.1546	34.9150
NETHERLAND GUILDER	2.2855	0.4313	0.4404	4.2918	4.2029	0.4444	5.3403	0.4747	1.6181
NETHERLAND GUILDER	3.9623	0.7516	0.7674	7.4782	7.3234	0.7743	9.5058	0.8271	2.8185
NETHERLAND GUILDER	2.6782	0.5432	0.5547	5.4049	5.2500	0.5566	6.7254	0.5978	2.0378
NETHERLAND GUILDER	18.6851	3.1457	3.2120	31.2959	30.6519	3.2407	38.9472	3.4620	11.8018
NETHERLAND GUILDER	2.1587	0.4089	0.4175	4.0586	3.9844	0.4213	5.0627	0.4500	1.5340
NETHERLAND GUILDER	1.2051	0.2274	0.2322	2.2631	2.2162	0.2343	2.8180	0.2803	0.9320

MAJOR CURRENCIES AGAINST JORDAN DINAAR									
CURRENCY	USE	LIBAN LIRA	NETHERLAND GUILDER	NETHERLAND GUILDER	NETHERLAND GUILDER	NETHERLAND GUILDER	NETHERLAND GUILDER	NETHERLAND GUILDER	NETHERLAND GUILDER
US DOLLAR	1.0000	1.6832	0.5972	0.7208	0.1781	0.8428	0.6381	0.8099	1.1720
GBRITAIN POUND	0.8482	1.0000	0.9501	0.9429	0.1071	0.5067	0.3181	0.8201	0.7047
NETHERLAND GUILDER	1.6756	2.7850	1.0000	1.2234	0.2882	1.1113	0.8880	1.0098	1.8622
NETHERLAND GUILDER	1.3687	2.2784	0.8174	1.0000	0.2437	1.1536	0.7442	0.8245	1.6041
NETHERLAND GUILDER	5.6105	9.3897	3.3535	4.1028	1.0000	4.7328	2.9712	3.8667	6.5814
NETHERLAND GUILDER	118.6500	197.3367	70.6570	86.6881	21.1280	100.00	62.7778	715.9894	138.0578
NETHERLAND GUILDER	1.8900	3.1424	1.1267	1.3609	0.3366	1.5056	1.7254	0.5978	2.0378
NETHERLAND GUILDER	6.0247	13.3457	4.7223	5.6550	1.4280	6.7833	4.2458	48.2864	8.4046
NETHERLAND GUILDER	15.3512	27.5779	9.9022	12.1148	2.9528	13.8748	8.7731	100.00	18.4822
NETHERLAND GUILDER	34.6190	57.5717	20.6716	25.2504	6.1842	29.1740	18.3148	208.7805	40.5688
NETHERLAND GUILDER	1.6181	2.6913	0.9683	1.1822	0.2882	1.3638	0.8591	9.7568	1.8864
NETHERLAND GUILDER	2.8195	4.6894	1.9538	2.2800	0.5521	3.3783	1.4916	17.0242	3.3045
NETHERLAND GUILDER	11.8018	19.8274	7.0475	8.6221	2.1015	9.9461	6.2439	71.1710	13.8828
NETHERLAND GUILDER	1.5340	2.5513	0.9161	1.1208	0.2732	1.2929	0.8116	9.2514	1.7979
NETHERLAND GUILDER	0.8532	1.4181	0.5056	0.6224	0.1519	0.7181	0.4515	6.1458	1.0000

CENTRAL BANK BULLETIN									
CURRENCY	ASK	BID	CURRENCY	ASK	BID	CURRENCY	ASK	BID	CURRENCY
US DOLLAR	0.7000	0.7000	NETHERLAND GUILDER	0.4250	0.4250	NETHERLAND GUILDER	0.4250	0.4250	NETHERLAND GUILDER
GBRITAIN POUND	1.1700	1.1700	NETHERLAND GUILDER	0.4250	0.4250	NETHERLAND GUILDER	0.4250	0.4250	NETHERLAND GUILDER
NETHERLAND GUILDER	0.4250	0.4250	NETHERLAND GUILDER	0.4250	0.4250	NETHERLAND GUILDER	0.4250	0.4250	NETHERLAND GUILDER
NETHERLAND GUILDER	0.4250	0.4250	NETHERLAND GUILDER	0.4250	0.4250	NETHERLAND GUILDER	0.4250	0.4250	NETHERLAND GUILDER
NETHERLAND GUILDER	0.4250	0.4250	NETHERLAND GUILDER	0.4250	0.4250	NETHERLAND GUILDER	0.4250	0.4250	NETHERLAND GUILDER
NETHERLAND GUILDER	0.4250	0.4250	NETHERLAND GUILDER	0.4250	0.4250	NETHERLAND GUILDER	0.4250	0.4250	NETHERLAND GUILDER
NETHERLAND GUILDER	0.4250	0.4250	NETHERLAND GUILDER	0.4250	0.4250	NETHERLAND GUILDER	0.4250	0.4250	NETHERLAND GUILDER
NETHERLAND GUILDER	0.4250	0.4250	NETHERLAND GUILDER	0.4250	0.4250	NETHERLAND GUILDER	0.4250	0.4250	NETHERLAND GUILDER
NETHERLAND GUILDER	0.4250	0.4250	NETHERLAND GUILDER	0.4250	0.4250	NETHERLAND GUILDER	0.4250	0.4250	NETHERLAND GUILDER

WORLD STOCK MARKETS									
STOCK MARKET	INDEX	CLOSING	LAST	CHANGE	PRECIOUS METALS	METAL	ASK	BID	PRECIOUS METALS
FRANKFURT	DAX	4773.23	4767.58	-5.65	GOLD	262.30	262.30	262.30	PRECIOUS METALS
HONG KONG	HANG SENG	10046.15	10056.78	+10.63	SILVER	477.17	477.17	477.17	PRECIOUS METALS
LONDON	FT-100	5578.70	5586.10	+7.40	PLATINUM	346.50	346.50	346.50	PRECIOUS METALS
NEW YORK	DJ INDUS.	9016.14	8879.96	-136.18					
NEW YORK	NYSE COMPOSITE	5715.00	563.43	-10.07					
NEW YORK	AMEX COMPOSITE	880.39	883.53	+3.14					
NEW YORK	S&P 500	1178.54	1150.14	-28.40					
TOKYO	NIKKEI 225	14639.91	14697.88	+57.97					
PARIS	CAC 40	3738.59	3715.67	-22.92					
FRANKFURT	COMMERZBANK	4472.20	4422.50	-49.70					

Gas deals at top of ME business agenda

Oman to sign with Enron Qatar-Mobil initial deal

MUSCAT (R) — Ommani oil minister said on Saturday his country will sign a 25-year liquefied natural gas (LNG) deal on Tuesday with Enron's Indian subsidiary, Mohammad ben Hamad ben Seif Al Ramhi, Minister of oil and gas, said at a news conference. "We are signing an agreement in two days time with the Indian subsidiary of Enron," Ramhi, speaking on the sidelines of an international economic conference in Muscat, said the deal would be for 1.65 million tonnes a year and would be announced on Tuesday, Dec. 8.

Enron India, a subsidiary of U.S.-based Enron Corp., is the majority shareholder in Dabhol Power Company, which is setting up a gas-based 2,450 megawatt power plant at Dabhol in India's western Maharashtra state.

Oman is a small, non-OPEC oil producers which depends on crude exports for 75 per cent of government revenues. In common with other oil producers its economy has been hit hard by the world crisis in oil prices.

Ramhi said there were a few prospects that would improve Oman's gas reserves. He did not elaborate, but added, "I think 25 years from now, we are going to see gas all over the Middle East."

DOHA (R) — Qatar on Saturday initiated a \$1 billion gas deal with U.S. energy giant Mobil to develop its massive North Field in a production sharing agreement.

"Qatar General Petroleum Corporation and Mobil Oil Qatar, an affiliate of Mobil Corporation announced... that they have signed a heads of agreement finalising terms for development of the new enhanced gas utilisation projects," the minister of energy and industry said in a statement.

Qatar's official news agency said the deal was worth about \$1 billion.

The statement said the project will produce gas from Qatar's North Field, with nominal capacity of a billion cubic feet per day of gas sales mostly to supply power, chemical, petrochemical and other industrial development in Qatar.

The deal will boost Mobil's presence in Qatar, which already includes the Rasgas and Qatargas joint ventures which are developing the North Field — the largest single concentration of gas in the world.

The project will also produce condensate, butane, propane and ethane as feedstock to refinery and petrochemicals.

THE Daily Crossword Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

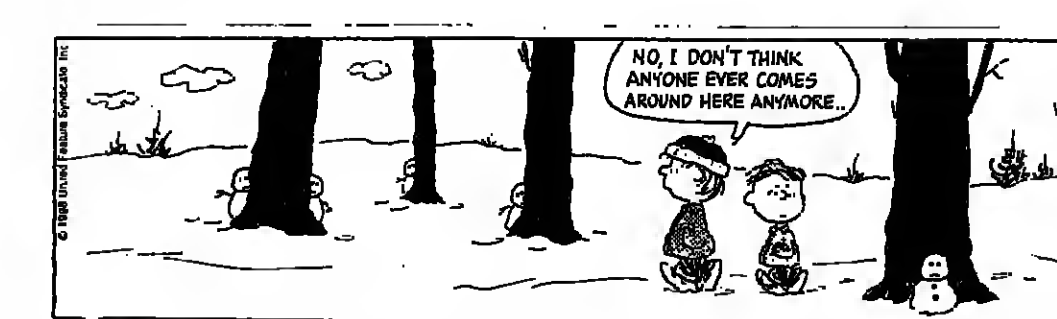
ACROSS

- 1 Bivouac
- 5 Singing John
- 10 Singing insect
- 14 80's musical
- 15 Greek letter
- 16 Brainstorm
- 17 Singer Guthrie
- 18 Contaminate
- 19 No water or ice
- 20 Home of the Bears
- 23 Make certain
- 24 Family members
- 28 Home of the White Sea
- 33 Weighed down
- 36 Gives a thumbs-up
- 37 7 on a sundial
- 38 Raw minerals
- 39 Capture
- 40 Fringe group
- 41 Sawdust
- 42 Ralph of 'The Waltons'
- 43 ___ up (adds music)
- 44 Home of the Bulls
- 47 Pacific islands
- 48 Bob Marley's forte
- 52 Home of the Cubs
- 57 Actress Samms
- 60 Diner employees
- 61 Composer Porter
- 62 Wild hog
- 63 Beginning
- 64 First among men?
- 65 Flaming superspy
- 68 Requirements
- 69 Singer Home

By James E. Buel

Fort Washington, MD

Peanuts



Andy Capp



Mutt'n'Jeff



THE BETTER HALF By Glasbergen



Oil ticks higher, but bears prevail

LONDON (R) — Depressed oil prices gained a little ground on Friday even though weak demand and a divided OPEC continued to drive bearish market sentiment.

"These little movements are just background noise," said Peter Gignoux of Salomon Smith Barney in London.

The International Petroleum Exchange benchmark Brent last traded four cents higher at \$10.22 a barrel on Friday but average oil prices this year, at around \$13.58, are at their lowest since 1976.

Traders ultimately shrugged off news that Norway on Friday had extended a cut of three per cent in its oil output, or about 100,000 barrels per day (bpd), for six months to June 30, 1999, in a bid to bolster sagging prices.

Traders instead trained their focus on a market smothered by an enormous stock overhang created by a demand collapse in Asia, an unusually warm start to winter in the northeast United States and rising Iraqi exports.

"We are 12 cents away from the OPEC basket (crude price) being 50 per cent down on the 1997 average," Gignoux said.

"That in itself is a pretty

damning indictment of OPEC's aptitude for price stabilisation."

OPEC members were divided at a winter meeting last week as Iran and Venezuela were charged with ignoring production curbs, which stand at 2.6 million bpd.

The group neither extended current restraint beyond the agreed June 1999 limit nor agreed to deepen cuts. Instead OPEC appeared to pin its hopes on a further meeting in March.

The research arm of Dresdner Kleinwort Benson bank in London on Thursday said OPEC output actually rose by 500,000 bpd in November to 27.5 million bpd after falling slightly in October.

"If our estimate of a rebound in OPEC output proves true, prices could dip further in the near term," the Dresdner Kleinwort report said.

Brokers GNI said the output increase reduced the compliance rate to 74 per cent from October's 90 per cent.

"These numbers are simply not good enough and prices will fall further unless certain producers see sense," a GNI daily market report said.

Even with a cold snap in

Europe and Asia, and the forecast of cooler temperatures in the United States next week, heating oil

stocks in particular continued to weigh on prices.

Dresdner lower its average 1998 Brent price forecast to \$13.00 a barrel from \$13.30 in view of poor fundamentals. It also cut its 1999 Brent forecast to \$13.00 from \$15.00.

"Short of a miraculously cold first quarter which might add 0.5 million bpd to demand, there is little prospect of any meaningful increase in oil prices before March," said the bank's latest oil and gas bulletin.

Even Saudi Arabia, the world's top crude oil exporter, was feeling the pinch. The Financial Times said on Friday that falling prices had forced the kingdom to turn to its United Arab Emirates neighbour Abu Dhabi for a loan estimated by Saudi bankers at \$5 billion. The report said the loan was needed to finance the Gulf state's soaring budget deficit.

Beirut banks refute merger rumours

Banque Audi, Libanaise say no deal

BEIRUT (R) — Lebanon's Banque Audi and Banque Libanaise pour le Commerce (BLC) said on Friday they were not discussing a merger, dismissing market rumours of a potential deal.

"There's nothing in this," said Michel Aramouni, head of capital markets at Banque Audi.

Talk of a possible merger between the two banks, among the top 10 in Lebanon's key financial sector, had driven

investors to buy their London-listed GDRs on Friday. Audi's GDR closed \$1.05 up at \$25.6 while BLC gained \$0.65 to \$17.85.

"Banque Libanaise pour le Commerce has noted the recent market speculations about a merger with or sale to a third party. The management of BLC would like to state that the bank has not entered into any sale or merger agreement," BLC Vice Chairman Jean Abou Jaoude said in a faxed

statement.

The statement said BLC had retained securities house Nomura International to "review the strategic options open to it in the light of the ongoing development of the banking industry in Lebanon."

"BLC will ensure any development that may arise from this review will be appropriately announced, the statement added without giving further details.

Brokers had also speculated the banks would

merge with investment bank Lebanon Invest. Lebanon Invest's chief financial officer, Rida Mroeh, denied the rumours.

Lebanon's central bank encourages mergers and acquisitions in the crowded financial sector. Last week, Bank of Beirut said it had signed a \$70 million merger agreement with Transorient Bank to form one of the top ten retail banks.

A.F.M. TRADE Saturday, 05-12-98

ACCESS 4646868

Company	Open	Price	Close	Change
BANKS				
ARAB BK	211.000	211.000	0.00%	
INTL BK	1.600	1.600	0.00%	
BK OF JO	1.700	1.700	0.00%	
MIDDLE EAST BK	1.020	1.020	0.00%	
INDUSTRIAL DEV. BK	1.430	1.430	0.00%	
THE HOUSING BK	2.700	2.700	0.00%	
JO. GULF BK	0.760	0.760	0.00%	
JO. INVEST. BK	1.430	1.430	0.00%	
BEST ELMAL	0.650	0.700	+1.45%	
PHILADELPHIA BK	0.610	0.600	-1.64%	
BANKS INDEX	276.710		point =	+0.24%
INSURANCE				
JERUSALEM INS	1.380	1.400	+1.45%	
JO. FRENCH INS	2.650	2.720	+2.64%	
AMAL INS	1.600	1.600	0.00%	
INSURANCE INDEX	125.470		point =	+0.26%
SERVICES				
ELECTRIC POWER	1.450	1.440	-0.69%	
VEHICLES OWNERS	2.080	2.140	+2.89%	
PORTFOLIO SECURITIES	0.810	0.800	-1.23%	
JO. INTL. TRADING CENT	0.310	0.300	-3.23%	
AL-RAT	5.200	5.380	+3.46%	
AL-ZARQA FOR EDU	0.840	0.840	0.00%	
UNION LAND DEV	0.630	0.630	0.00%	
UNIFIED LAND TRANS	1.140	1.130	-0.88%	
SERVICES INDEX	102.810		point =	+0.12%
INDUSTRY				
CEMENT	2.400	2.500	+4.17%	
PHOSPHATE	1.140	1.140	0.00%	
PETROLEUM REFINERY	10.220	10.210	-0.10%	
THE IND. COMM. & AGRIC	1.040	1.040	0.00%	
ARAB PHARMACEUTICAL	2.510	2.540	+1.20%	
TOBACCO & CIGARET	1.300	1.280	-1.54%	
JO. PIPES	1.070	1.070	0.00%	
ARAB CHEMICAL ENTER	7.100	6.900	-2.82%	
INTL STEEL	0.630	0.620	-1.59%	
DAR AL-DAWA	4.900	4.880	-0.41%	
MIDDLE EAST COMPLEX	0.660	0.660	0.00%	
JO. STEEL	0.890	0.890	0.00%	
ARAB ALUMINIUM	2.060	2.100	+1.94%	
CHLORINE	1.240	1.240	0.00%	
LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	0.400	0.400	0.00%	
PETRO-CHEMICAL	0.630	0.630	0.00%	
ROCKWOOL	0.340	0.330	-2.94%	
UNIVERSAL CHEMICAL	1.030	1.030	0.00%	
GENERAL INVES	3.240	3.260	+0.31%	
NTL CABLE	0.680	0.680	0.00%	
SULPHO-CHEMICALS	0.400	0.380	-5.00%	
ARAB CENTER FOR PHAR	1.170	1.170	0.00%	
UNIVERSAL MODERN IND	0.650	0.630	-3.08%	
IND. RESOURCES	0.420	0.430	+2.38%	
NEW CAPLES	0.620	0.620	0.00%	
INTL ALUMINIUM	0.720	0.720	0.00%	
INDUSTRY INDEX	73.120		point =	+0.92%
PARALLEL				
EXPORT BK (75)	0.810	0.810	0.00%	
CENTRAL SYRUS	0.300	0.320	+6.67%	
UNION INVS. CORP	0.720	0.720	0.00%	
AL - EKBA	0.810	0.800	-1.23%	
AL - SHARI	0.900	0.950	+5.56%	
MEDICAL APPLIANCES	0.340	0.360	+5.88%	
ARAB INTL. TRIBE	0.220	0.210	-4.55%	
OPTICAL & AUDIAL	0.380	0.380	0.00%	
INAMCO	0.280	0.270	-3.57%	
TEXTILE & PLASTIC	0.270	0.270	0.00%	
TRIMOLE EAST PRARI 90	0.570	0.570	0.00%	
UNITED ENG. IND	0.210	0.210	0.00%	
INTL. TEXTILE WAND	0.150	0.150	0.00%	
NUTRI DAR	0.690	0.690	0.00%	
INTL. MEDICAL	1.000	1.000	0.00%	
GRAND INDEX	165.58		point =	+0.39%

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6, 1998

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) You're looking good, and you're attracting a lot of attention. You may tend to be self-centred, however. If a loved one seems a little quiet, that could be why. He or she is feeling left out. Make a time for this person. You'll be glad you did.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) You could get a great deal on a household item today. You might even find it for free. Either that, or you'll be able to make a real estate purchase with no money down. A little shopping is required to find this bargain, but it's out there. Get busy.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) It may be hard to keep your opinions to yourself today. That's OK. You don't need to do that. Let the whole world know how you feel. People will be interested; they might even put your plan into effect.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) You're probably worth more money than you've been making. This is a good day to point that out to the boss. If you don't have a job, it's a good day to find one. Might as well go for one that pays well, while you're at it.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) The eyes of the multitudes are upon you. That's the way you like it. The single most feared situation in the world, for most people, is public speaking. You, on the other hand, love the attention. Go ahead and put on a great show.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) You could be in charge of a lot of people's destinies today. They don't realise how important you are. You could withdraw your support and watch everything come tumbling down, but don't do that. You'll get your reward, but maybe not in the way you expect.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) You have to make sure that several very strong egos get along. You're the manager, in that you manage to get them to see eye to eye. It's not that they couldn't do it without you, it's just that they wouldn't do it as well. Give yourself credit for a job well done.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) You could be earning a lot more money in the future. The bad news is that the money may be delayed. Perhaps it's an actual treasure you're after! If so, use all of your expertise and imagination to find it and dig it up. Don't give up.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) This would be a great day to travel. If you travel in your work, your job will be even more fun than usual. Don't forget an important part of the assignment, like, for example, making the sale.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) Give a major purchase careful consideration. The decision you make now could affect your income and outgo for quite some time. If you're purchasing real estate, it could be a good investment. Don't take too big a risk, however.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) You and your mate seem to be locking horns. You're both stubborn, so the chances are not good that either of you will concede graciously. A neighbour or close relative can give you a fabulous idea. Go ahead and talk out your frustration.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) You're good at figuring out what other people want, and proving it. That talent will be useful now, as you come in contact with a demanding person. If you've known this person for a while, you can get a few things ready ahead of time.

Birth Stone of December: Turquoise — Zircon

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2nd Division Basketball Championship Leaders Wihdat face Homentmen today

By a Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Top three standings remained unchanged after the latest round of the Second Division Basketball Championship but that is likely to change after Sunday's matches.

Leaders Al Wihdat Sunday meet Homentmen who are second on points after both teams won their two opening matches. The winner Sunday will take a clear lead atop the standings.

Al Wihdat, playing in the second division for the second year after finishing runner up last year, seem capable of clinching one of two qualifying berths to the First Division next year.

They beat Al Ashrafieh

108-46 and Abu Nusair 105-72.

Homentmen on the other hand, were formerly a First Division team, and are struggling to regain their place for the third year now.

They managed a 64-59 win over Ashrafieh and beat Al Rayeh 77-53 in their first match.

Al Fuheis are in third place and will have an easy match against Al Rayeh. They were a considerable threat to the top teams last year. Samma meet Al Ashrafieh in Sunday's fourth match.

The last event on the Jordan Basketball Federation's (JBF) current agenda — eight teams are taking part in the second division.

Missing from the event is

Al Watani, also a former First Division team who were relegated but failed to participate in the second division.

Two teams will be promoted this year making the total number of First Division teams eight instead of six.

The JBF this year organized only three other events: the first division and the Under-14 won by Al Orthodoxi, Al Ahli, Al Jazireh, and the under-16 won by Al Jazireh.

The women's, juniors, and under-22 were cancelled while the JBF is discussing holding the under-18 with the concerned clubs.

The first division includes Al Orthodoxi, Al Ahli, Al Jazireh, Al Jalil, Al Hussein, Al Jeel.

Sunday's matches

Rayeh-Fuheis	4:30 p.m.	Sports Palace
Wihdat-Homentmen	6:00 p.m.	Sports Palace
Ashrafieh-Samma	4:30 p.m.	Hassan Sports City
Abu Nusair-Ebbin	6:00 p.m.	Hassan Sports City

STANDINGS

Team	P	W	L	SE	SA	Pts
Wihdat	2	2	-	213	118	4
Homentmen	2	2	-	141	112	4
Fuheis	2	2	-	140	114	4
Rayeh	2	1	1	101	102	3
Abu Nusair	2	-	2	130	177	2
Ashrafieh	2	-	2	105	172	2
Ebbin	1	-	1	56	68	1
Samma	1	-	1	25	48	1

Bayer steal Bundesliga lead from Bayern

HAMBURG (DPA) — Bayer Leverkusen ended Bayern Munich's reign at the top of the Bundesliga standings after three and a half months on Saturday with an impressive 3-0 hammering of VfL Wolfsburg.

Leverkusen's win with the help of two goals from star striker Ulf Kirsten clearly gives them the momentum going into next weekend's top of the table clash with Bayern in Munich's Olympic stadium.

Bayer stretched their unbeaten run to 13 games. For Wolfsburg, it was the first defeat in 10 games during which they climbed from last to sixth place in the standings.

Leverkusen and Munich, who were held to a 2-2 draw at VfL Bochum Friday night, have 35 points apiece. But Leverkusen's superior goal difference ended Munich's run at the top that had started August 22.

However, Munich have a game in hand, on December 16 at last-placed Borussia Moenchengladbach.

Their coach Ottmar Hitzfeld insisted: "We are in a good position. After all we are playing Leverkusen at home."

In other action on a thin schedule due to three cancellations by wintery weather, Jonathan Akpoborie scored a hat-trick as VfB Stuttgart held off

SV Hamburg 3-1 the day after their coach Winfried Schäfer quit after plenty of had blood with the players.

Struggling Schalke, meanwhile, left the relegation zone for 12th place by winning 2-1 at Eintracht Frankfurt. In another match played Friday, visiting Hansa Rostock fought from 2-0 down to a 2-2 draw in Nuremberg.

But all attention was on Leverkusen, who have not lost since a 2-1 home defeat against Hamburg September 9 and conceded just one goal in their last six games.

The sellout 22,500 crowd having cold temperatures and snow showers saw a cautious start from both teams as Leverkusen and Wolfsburg showed a lot of respect for one another.

The opening goal came out of the blue in the 21st. Eric Meijer stole the ball in midfield, marched down the right wing and sent an accurate cross to Kirsten, who fired home from inside the goalmouth.

Leverkusen took full control now and just five minutes later Kirsten, back from a two-week injury layoff, got his ninth goal of the season with a diving header off Carsten Ramelow's corner kick.

Wolfsburg's only notable chance came in the 33rd, but Adam Matyssek got his fists up

in time to stop Holger Ballwanz' short range volley.

The hosts clinched the match nine minutes into the second half with a short range effort next to the near left post from their Brazilian midfielder Ze Roberto for what turned out the final 3-0 scoreline.

Stuttgart's woes seemed to continue under caretaker coach Wolfgang Rolff when visiting Hamburg snatched a 37th-minute lead through Bernd Hollerbach.

But the sparkling form of Akpoborie allowed the Nigerian striker to target in the 43rd, 46th and 51st. Stuttgart moved up from 11th to ninth place.

The weekend action is completed Sunday when fourth-placed 1860 Munich meet No. 5 Borussia Dortmund.

The matches Hertha BSC Berlin vs. Sc Freiburg and Borussia Moenchengladbach were rescheduled for Tuesday while MSV Duisburg will now host reigning champions Kaiserslautern December 16.



Bastia goalkeeper Eric Durand (L) makes a save before Nantes' Nicolas Gillet in a French D1 match. Nantes won 2-0 (AFP photo)

Foe makes comeback in 3-0 Lens victory

PARIS (R) — RC Lens tuned up for their European Champions' League decider against Dynamo Kiev with a 3-0 home win over Strasbourg and the welcome return from injury of Cameroon midfielder Marc-Vivien Foe on Friday.

Rennes climbed to third place at the halfway stage in the championship with a 0-0 draw at Metz but are 10 points behind pacesetters Girondins Bordeaux and Olympique Marseille, who both played on Thursday.

Halfway stage leaders Bordeaux were crowned "autumn champions" despite going down 2-1 at Olympique Lyon after Marseille were held 1-1 at AJ Auxerre to remain second on goal difference.

Seven teams in the last 15 seasons have won the championship after leading half way. The last were Nantes in the 1994-95 season.

Foe came on as a substitute 10 minutes from time at Lens to mark his return after breaking a leg nearly eight months ago, missing out on the World Cup finals and a transfer to Manchester United.

Lens, who meet Dynamo Kiev at home on Wednesday looking for a place in the European Cup quarter-finals, dominated Strasbourg throughout, scoring all three goals in the second half. But they will sorely miss Tony Vairelles, who laid on two of the goals, with the winger suspended for Wednesday's match after being sent off in

Lens' upset 1-0 win over Arsenal at Wembley 10 days ago.

Vairelles sent a lobbed cross from the right over two defenders for Czech Vladimir Smicer to open the scoring in the 50th minute.

Five minutes later Ghana midfielder Alex Nyarko chested the ball down outside the box and beat Slovakia's Alexander Vencel in the Strasbourg goal with a fine volley.

Substitute Wagneau Eloi added a third 11 minutes from time when he headed home another cross from the right by the tenacious Vairelles, who won the ball from two defenders.



Russian Anton Sikharulidze holds up his partner Elena Berezhnaya during the pairs' free skating event in the NHK Trophy International Figure Skating competition in Sapporo, northern Japan. The world champion pair won the event (AFP photo)

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Davis wins 3rd event at U.S. Open

COLLEGE STATION, Texas (R) — American Josh Davis won his third event in the U.S. Open swimming championships on Friday night. Davis won the 200-meter freestyle in a U.S. record time of 1 minute, 45.24 seconds. In four nights of the World Cup and the U.S. Open, Davis swam 21 races in preliminaries and finals. He has won five events, three at the U.S. Open and two earlier in the week at the World Cup, set three U.S. records, two U.S. Open records and three meet records. "I have been working real hard at being intense in the pool," Davis said. "But this is more than I ever hoped for. I have been on the U.S. national team for eight years and I am 26 years old and these are my first three American records. I guess I can improve before the Olympics." The three-day U.S. Open was to conclude on Saturday.

Bruges open 6-point lead

BRUSSELS (R) — Champions Club Bruges opened a six-point lead at the top of the Belgian first division on Friday with a 2-1 win at Westerlo. The league leaders were stunned in the 11th minute when Benoit Thauw curled in a fine free kick, but Bruges equalised just before half time through a Nzelo Lembi volley. Westerlo, who have the best goal-scoring record in the Belgian first division so far this season, went close several times after the equaliser before Bruges reasserted themselves towards the end. With 11 minutes to go, Darko Anic surged into the Westerlo penalty area and was fouled by Mario Verheyen. Verheyen was sent off and Vital Borkelmans fired home the penalty. It was the only first division game played on Friday. Second-placed Genk play on Sunday and third-placed Lokeren on Saturday.

Orioles sign DeShields

BALTIMORE (R) — The busy Baltimore Orioles took care of some more off-season business on Friday by signing free agent second baseman Belino DeShields and resigning outfielder B.J. Surhoff. Both players were given three-year contracts with Surhoff, who also was a free agent, receiving an option for 2002. In the 29-year-old DeShields, the Orioles found a second baseman to take over the spot from Roberto Alomar, who left for the Cleveland Indians via free agency. DeShields hit 0290 with seven homers, 44 RBI and 26 stolen bases for the St. Louis Cardinals last season. DeShields, who has also played for Montreal and Los Angeles, averaged 47 steals in his seven full seasons before 1998. The 34-year-old Surhoff batted .279 and established career highs with 160 hits, 22 home runs and 92 RBI last season. Surhoff had received offers from the Pittsburgh Pirates and New York Mets, but the interest from the Mets ended after they signed free agent third baseman Robin Ventura. "I received some other offers, but this is where I wanted to be," said Surhoff, who may shift from leftfield to right to accommodate Baltimore's new free-agent slugger Albert Belle. Earlier this week, the Orioles acquired catcher Charles Johnson in a three-way deal with the New York Mets and Los Angeles Dodgers.

Mets deal Blair to Tigers

NEW YORK (R) — The New York Mets, reportedly in the market for free agent outfielder Rickie Henderson, freed up some salary on Friday by sending pitcher Willie Blair to the Detroit Tigers for infielder Joe Randa. Mets general manager Steve Phillips talked about possibly moving Randa, who has played all four infield positions, in another deal. Randa, 28, hit .254 with nine homers and 50 RBI in 138 games for Detroit last season and is eligible for arbitration. "We feel that we have given ourselves some options," said Phillips. "He can help us as a right-handed bat off the bench or help us bring back value to our ballclub. It freed up some money for us and gives us some freedom to explore other options." For Blair, the return to Detroit completes a rocky circle that began when he went 16-8 in 27 starts for the Tigers in 1997. In the off-season he signed a three-year, \$11.5 million contract with the Arizona Diamondbacks, going 4-15 with a 5.34 ERA in 23 starts after starting the year 0-7. He was then sent to the Mets for Bernard Gilkey. With New York, Blair went 1-1, lowering his ERA just below 5.00 for the season.

GOREN BRIDGE

WITH OMAR SHARIF & YAMNAN HIRSHI
Chess & Bridge Magazine, Inc.

WEEKLY BRIDGE QUIZ

- Q. 1 - As South, vulnerable, you hold:
- 463 010642 03754 10885
- The bidding has proceeded:
- NORTH EAST SOUTH WEST
- 3NT Pass 1
- What action do you take?
- Q. 2 - North-South vulnerable, as South you hold:
- 42 038 0A Q10632 AKJ32
- The bidding has proceeded:
- SOUTH WEST NORTH EAST
- 10 Pass 10 Pass
- What do you bid now?
- Q. 3 - As South, vulnerable, you hold:
- AK10878 0K Q32 0Q6 AQ10
- Partner opens the bidding with one no trump. What do you respond?
- Q. 4 - Both vulnerable, as South you hold:
- AAKQ3 0J982 01064 AK5
- Partner opens the bidding with one diamond. What do you respond?
- Q. 5 - Neither vulnerable, as South you hold:
- AA1082 063 0108748 AK8
- The bidding has proceeded:
- NORTH EAST SOUTH WEST
- 1A 10 Pass 10 Pass
- What action do you take?
- Q. 6 - Neither vulnerable, as South you hold:
- AK397 0874 086 AK5
- The bidding has proceeded:
- WEST NORTH EAST SOUTH
- 10 10 20 20
- What action do you take?

TODAY AT

CINEMA TEL:463-4144

PHILADELPHIA '1'

Richard Gere .. in

RED CORNER

Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30

CINEMA TEL:463-4144

PHILADELPHIA '2'

Jeff Bridges .. in

WHITE SQUALL

Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30

CINEMA TEL:5699238

PLAZA

Comedian

Mohammad Huneidi .. in

SAEEDI AT THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30

CINEMA TEL:5677420

CONCORD

CONCORD '1'

John Travolta & Emma Thompson .. in

PRIMARY COLORS

Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:00, 8:15, 10:30

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Antonio Banderas .. in

THE MASK OF ZORRO

Shows: 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30

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GALLERIA 2

ABDOUN

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Comedian

Mohammad Huneidi .. in

SAEEDI AT THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

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Highway Yarmouk

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Mubarak says Syria wants better Turk ties

ANKARA (R) — Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on Saturday delivered a message from Syrian President Hafez Assad to his Turkish counterpart, Suleyman Demirel, as part of efforts to improve damaged ties between Ankara and Damascus.

Relations between Syria and Turkey suffered earlier this year when Ankara threatened to use force unless Syria halted its alleged support for Turkish Kurds fighting for self-rule.

"I have conveyed to Mr. Demirel the desire of Mr. Assad to improve bilateral relations and to build a constructive and productive cooperation between the two nations," Mubarak told a joint news conference with Demirel in Ankara.

"The Syrian president is sincere [in his efforts] to rehabilitate relations with Turkey," said Mubarak, who arrived on Saturday at the start of a two-day visit to Turkey during which he also plans to discuss Cairo's trade relations with Ankara.

Mubarak shuttled between Ankara and Damascus in early October to try to ease the tensions created by Turkey's threats

of force against Syria.

Egyptian mediation efforts later helped to produce a deal in which Syria pledged not to allow guerrilla activities of the Kurdish Labour Party (PKK) on its soil.

But Demirel was cautious over the Syrian rapprochement, saying he had expected it to act on the recent deal struck between Turkish and Syrian diplomats in the southern Turkish town of Adana.

"We would like to start a new era to rid of the sediments left by past incidents... but the Adana deal must operate better," he said. He did not give details.

The deal is believed to have forced PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan to leave Syria after living there for years.

Ocalan, who stayed briefly in Russia, was arrested on arrival in Italy, triggering a diplomatic row between Ankara and Rome — both members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

Asked whether he was planning to meet Assad, Demirel said: "It is too early for that."

The 14 years of conflict between Turkish armed

forces and the PKK has claimed more than 29,000 lives.

Ocalan has been under house arrest in Rome since Nov. 12. Turkey wants his extradition, but Italy says its constitution prevents it from sending suspects to countries with the death penalty.

Mubarak will also seek ways to boost trade relations during meetings he is due to have with Turkish officials on Sunday.

"We are aiming to raise trade volume to \$1 billion. We will also discuss setting up of free trade zones to that end," he said. Turkey's annual trade volume with Egypt now is around \$650 million.

Economy Minister Youssef Boutros-Ghali, Supply and Trade Minister Ahmad Gueily and a delegation of businessmen were accompanying Mubarak, an indication of the commercial nature of his latest visit.

The government-owned Al-Ahram newspaper quoted Egypt's ambassador to Turkey, Mahdi Fathallah, as saying that the volume of bilateral trade had increased last year by 25 per cent. He gave no figures.

4 policemen killed in Algeria — report

ALGIERS (R) — Radical Islamists killed four policemen and wounded several others in two ambushes in Algeria, bringing to around 50 the number of people killed in an upsurge of violence this week, the daily newspaper *Liberte* said on Saturday.

Armed Islamists gunned down three policemen and wounded several in an ambush on Friday in the Lakhdaria area of Bouira province, 90 kilometres east of Algiers, the paper said.

In a second ambush on the same day, rebels shot dead the head of a local police force, known as Communal Guards, in the Ighil Nath Amer area of the same province, it added.

The daily newspaper *Le Quotidien d'Oran* said on Saturday rebels killed two members of a government force in a similar ambush in the Telagh area of the western province of Sidi Bel Abbes on Tuesday.

It said "armed Islamists" cut the throats of two civilians at a fake roadblock on Thursday near Ghar Ettouba town, some 300 kilometres southwest of Algiers.

The killings brought to some

50 the number of people, mostly civilians, reported killed in the past five days, according to newspaper and official reports.

La Nouvelle Republique said the carnage was ominous of more blood to be shed ahead of the fasting month of Ramadan which will be observed in the second half of December depending on the sighting of the moon.

"[The rebels] appeared to have restructured their forces during the relative lull of the summer and regained strength despite successive assaults by government troops on their hideouts," the newspaper said.

La Nouvelle Republique said the rebels are expected to step up killings ahead of and during Ramadan, as they did in such period in the past four years.

Muslim guerrillas reckon Ramadan as an auspicious month for what they call their "holy war" against the government.

About 1,200 people have been killed in Ramadan last year in a gruesome pattern established in the previous years. The government blames rebels on the carnage.

Annan in Libya, hopes to 'break ice' over Lockerbie

(Continued from page 1)

British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook had a 15-minute telephone conversation with Annan on Saturday before the launch of the secretary general's mission.

Cook's ministry said the Anglo-American offer of a trial in a third country was genuine and serious and that there was no hidden agenda.

"The key point on which we are insisting is that, if convicted, the suspects

would have to serve sentences in a Scottish prison," a spokesman said.

"But we are happy to put in place international observer structures to confirm that they were being treated properly."

If Libya does decide to surrender the men, the United Nations has made arrangements to fly them to the Netherlands within 24 hours, diplomats said.

An aircraft is waiting on standby in Italy ready to fly to Tripoli to collect them.

Syria, Iraq invite Turkey to attend water talks

(Continued from page 1)

Syria and Iraq have strongly criticised Ankara's multibillion-dollar plan for building dams on the Euphrates, saying this has led to a sharp decline in the flow of water in both countries, who use it for drinking and irrigation.

Officials said the Iraqi

irrigation minister conferred on Saturday with Syrian Prime Minister Mahmoud Zu'bi and both agreed to promote irrigation cooperation.

"The Syrian and Iraqi sides agreed to step up coordination in all international conferences and meetings that deal with water," one official said.

Yeltsin may be ready to return

MOSCOW (AP) — President Boris Yeltsin is ready to return to work, his spokesman said Saturday, nearly two weeks after the president was hospitalised with pneumonia.

What spokesman Dmitri Yakushkin didn't say, however, was exactly when Yeltsin will return. Since his hospitalisation on Nov. 22, Yeltsin has hovered in the deep background of Russia's political discourse, largely unseen and unheard.

His place at the centre of national affairs has been taken by his prime minister, Yevgeny Primakov. In announcing Yeltsin's imminent return, Yakushkin tried to restore some lustre to the president's image, depicting him as an active, well-connected executive even from his hospital bed — an image few Russians are likely to believe anymore.

Speaking on Echo Moscow radio, Yakushkin said Yeltsin "remains the most influential politician in the country, no matter what is said about it." He noted that the president remains in control of the device that would authorise a nuclear strike.

He described Yeltsin as someone who is "full of energy, speaks very brightly and works a lot." A desk in his hospital room is heaped with working papers, and Yeltsin keeps fully abreast of events in the country, the spokesman said.

He remarked that alcoholic beverages, for which the president is known to enjoy, are "absolutely prohibited" in the hospital.

"The president does not think about his early resignation," Yakushkin said. He added that Yeltsin "is closely watching sharp or insulting statements made by certain politicians concerning his actions."

(Continued from page 1)

But financiers said investors were waiting to hear the new action plan before passing judgment, especially as the cabinet consists of super ministries grouping disparate portfolios and several ministers without political track records.

Only two ministers were carried over from the Hariri administration — Interior Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Michel Al Murr and Suleiman Tony Franjeh,



PALESTINIAN COMMERCIAL FLIGHT: A Jordanian woman hands out roses to passengers as they disembark from the first Palestinian commercial flight out of Gaza International Airport, which landed in Amman on Saturday. The Fokker-50, carrying 45 passengers, was held up for nearly four hours due to disagreements between Israeli and Palestinian authorities over security procedures (AFP photo)

PLO's Central Council to meet on charter

'We will not vote... we will clap to speeches by President Arafat and President Clinton'

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (R) — Palestinian leaders, naming the day for fulfilment of one of their Wye River pledges to Israel, have called a meeting of the Palestinian Central Council (PCC) in Gaza on Thursday to reaffirm their acceptance of Israel's right to exist.

The PCC, speaking for the membership of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), is expected to endorse President Yasser Arafat's nullification of articles in the PLO's Charter which called for the destruction of the state of Israel.

"The Palestinian Central Council will meet in Gaza on Thursday at 10:30 a.m. [local time]," said Saleem Al Zanoun, who is the speaker of Palestine National Council (PNC), a larger and broader body which includes those who belong to the PCC.

Zanoun told Reuters that the PCC will discuss several issues

including the PLO charter.

"President Yasser Arafat's letter to U.S. President Bill Clinton which outlines the articles in the charter that have been revoked by the PNC in 1996 will be submitted for discussion and the 125-member PCC will be required to vote to endorse it," he said.

The Wye River deals signed in Washington in October require that the PCC meet to reaffirm the letter of Jan. 22, 1998 from Arafat to Clinton concerning the charter articles that are inconsistent with the peace deals.

Members of the PNC, the Palestinian Legislative Council, the cabinet and other Palestinian bodies are also required to reaffirm their support for the peace process in another meeting to be addressed by Clinton and Arafat in mid-December.

"We have issued invitations to all 730 members of the PNC, and to members of other Palestinian institutions to attend this public meeting that would be addressed by President Arafat and President Clinton," Zanoun said.

Palestinian officials said the large meeting would not vote for the nullification of the charter provisions which call for Israel's destruction.

"We will not vote. We will clap to the speeches of President Arafat and President Clinton," said negotiator Hassan Asfour.

The extraordinary session of the PNC that was held in Gaza in 1996 had overwhelmingly voted in favour of the cancellation of those provisions. Therefore they do not exist and the PLO is now without a charter until it drafts a new covenant," said PLO Executive Committee member Mahmoud Abbas.

In 1996, 504 PNC members voted in favour of amending the charter, 45 voted

against and 14 abstained. Over 133 members, mainly from the opposition, did not attend the gathering.

The PLO's charter was drafted in 1964 and calls for liberating all of British-mandate Palestine through armed struggle.

Israel, which has not accepted the 1996 PNC's decision, demands that the 730 PNC members meet again to vote for the charter's amendment.

Around 60 members of the Palestinian opposition in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are preparing to hold a conference on the day set for the large public meeting that would be attended by Clinton to express their rejection to changes in the charter.

Leaders of the Damascus-based opposition groups, in a challenge to Arafat and his peace policies, were also preparing to hold a conference on that same day aimed at forming a new PLO.

Yilmaz, Ecevit agree on 'one-half' of planned coalition, Ciller still needed

ANKARA (DPA) — Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit said on Saturday he had reached agreement on one-half of a planned coalition government and would seek the other half on Monday.

"The Motherland Party (ANAP) has said that it would unconditionally support our model," Ecevit told reporters in Ankara after meeting for 40 minutes with ANAP chairman and Premier Mesut Yilmaz.

Ecevit, who was charged with forming a government on Wednesday, a week after the collapse of Yilmaz's minority government over claims of mafia

links, is seeking to set up a three-party government between his Democratic Left Party (DSP), ANAP and Tansu Ciller's True Path Party (DYP).

"This is the most appropriate and realistic formula. I do not think it right to consider other models without first conferring with the DYP," Ecevit said Saturday.

The DSP chairman is expected to meet Ciller Monday. The DYP has already said that it was against Ecevit's proposal which they describe as a "resurrection of the toppled government."

Ecevit said he would meet Yilmaz a second time

after his meeting with Ciller, adding that he would decide afterwards whether to meet other party leaders.

Both Ecevit and Yilmaz warned that Turkey should not waste precious time in setting up a new government when the country is facing serious domestic and external problems.

"The important thing is to set up a government which would have the majority in parliament and which would protect Turkey's interests," Yilmaz said Saturday.

The two leaders added that they had agreed a legislative programme for parliament, including a bill

on granting voting rights to Turks living abroad and a move to restrict political immunity.

Ecevit, meanwhile, said he hoped efforts to form a government would not take a long time, forcing President Suleyman Demirel to set up a caretaker government responsible for holding elections scheduled for April 18 next year.

Ecevit's DSP is the fourth biggest party with 61 deputies in the 550-seat parliament. The Islamist Virtue Party (FP) has the upper hand with 144 seats, followed by ANAP with 136 seats and DYP with 99 seats.

Iraq says weapons inspectors distorting facts

(Continued from page 1)

Amin said the cabinet was out of order and had been discarded in an old storehouse which UNSCOM had already inspected. He said just one filter had been found and said it was for purifying

drinking water.

The inspectors, charged with overseeing the scrapping of Iraq's biological and chemical weapons and long-range missile programmes, have been working in Iraq for seven years but say Iraq has consistently withheld information

from them.

They have been rebuilding their operations after briefly evacuating last month at the height of a standoff between Iraq and the United Nations. Diplomats say UNSCOM will test vigorously Baghdad's promise of

renewed co-operation.

Iraq is pushing for a comprehensive review of its compliance with U.N. disarmament requirements, hoping this will lead to an easing of tough sanctions imposed for its 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

Lebanon's new cabinet drafts reform programme

(Continued from page 1)

But financiers said investors were waiting to hear the new action plan before passing judgment, especially as the cabinet consists of super ministries grouping disparate portfolios and several ministers without political track records.

Only two ministers were carried over from the Hariri administration — Interior Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Michel Al Murr and Suleiman Tony Franjeh,

appointed to the newly-formed agriculture, housing and cooperatives ministry.

Key figures in the new government include Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Nasser Saidi, a well-respected central bank vice governor, and

Public Works and Transportation Minister Najeeb Miqati, head of one of Lebanon's two private sector mobile telephone firms.

"We are facing several challenges," said Mohamed Youssef Beydoun, who was

given the newly-combined education, culture, youth, guidance and sports portfolios.

"But the academic and reputable nature of this cabinet makes me optimistic about the future," he said in a statement.

Body scanners offer the perfect tailor's fit

LONDON (R) — British computer scientists have developed a sophisticated body scanner which provides shoppers with a "virtual changing room" where 300,000 points all over your body can be measured with perfect precision.

"It will be the biggest revolution in shopping for a generation," said Philip Treleven, project leader at the University College, London, of the fashion scanner awarded a 3.4 million pound government research grant. "Going to the shops and trying on clothes could become a thing of the past. You could do it all from home, never go into a changing room again if you don't want to," he told Saturday's *Mirror* newspaper.

More good news for wine drinkers.

WASHINGTON (R) — Wine drinkers get another good reason to enjoy the occasional glass — doctors said Friday it could reduce the risk of stroke.

The Danish study in the journal *Stroke* found that people who drink moderate amounts of wine have a lower risk of stroke than those who drink beer or spirits. Many studies have found that people who drink moderate amounts of alcohol have no more than about two glasses a day — tend to have a lower risk of heart disease. Some of the studies indicate that wine has stronger effects, while others indicate any alcohol does the trick.

Italians come out in favour of female president

ROME (R) — For the first time in their country's 177-year history, Italians are warming to the idea of a female head of state.

According to a poll commissioned by Italy's *Espresso* magazine, 41 per cent of those questioned said they were in favour of a female president.

Just 13 per cent said they were against having a woman as head of state. The remaining 46 per cent were "indifferent" to the whole issue. The poll was conducted by the Italian current president, Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, expires in May. Possible candidates for the post include European Commissioner Emma Bonino, former Foreign Minister Susanna Agnelli and insurance broker turned media host Letizia Moratti.

Florists accused of grave offence

LONDON (R) — A married couple stole wreaths and floral tributes from a north of England cemetery under cover of darkness for their flower shop, a court was told. Mary Scott, 35, and her husband David, 60, were allegedly caught in the act by the North Shields churchyard's caretaker in April. Police searches of the couple's home uncovered a stash of condoleance cards, including one in a child's handwriting reading "To Uncle Jim, goodbye and God bless." The couple pleaded not guilty at Newcastle Crown Court to five charges of theft. The case continues.

Foul odour forces 3,000 out of office

PHOENIX (R) — A mysterious noxious odour swept through a large Phoenix office building Friday, sending at least a dozen people to the hospital and forcing about 3,000 people into the street, fire officials said.

About 50 people were treated for nausea and other problems. Fire officials said the sickened people reported mild breathing problems, nausea and headaches, but no one was believed to be seriously injured.

It was not immediately known what the odour was and where it was coming from, said Battalion Chief Phil Yeager of Phoenix fire department spokesman. Several building workers said there had been a gas-like smell in the building.

But Southwest Gas Corp. officials reported that they could find no gas leak.

The Israeli government has decided to hold up its withdrawal from the West Bank for the dispute, but it should proceed as scheduled.

Some on the Israeli side believed that steps were being taken to free Palestinian prisoners.

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